



THE OLYMPICS: TEARS AND CHEERS

Sports Illustrated

Complete
**SCOUTING
REPORTS**
— P. 91 —

— SI's —
**ALL-TOUGH
TEAM**

2004

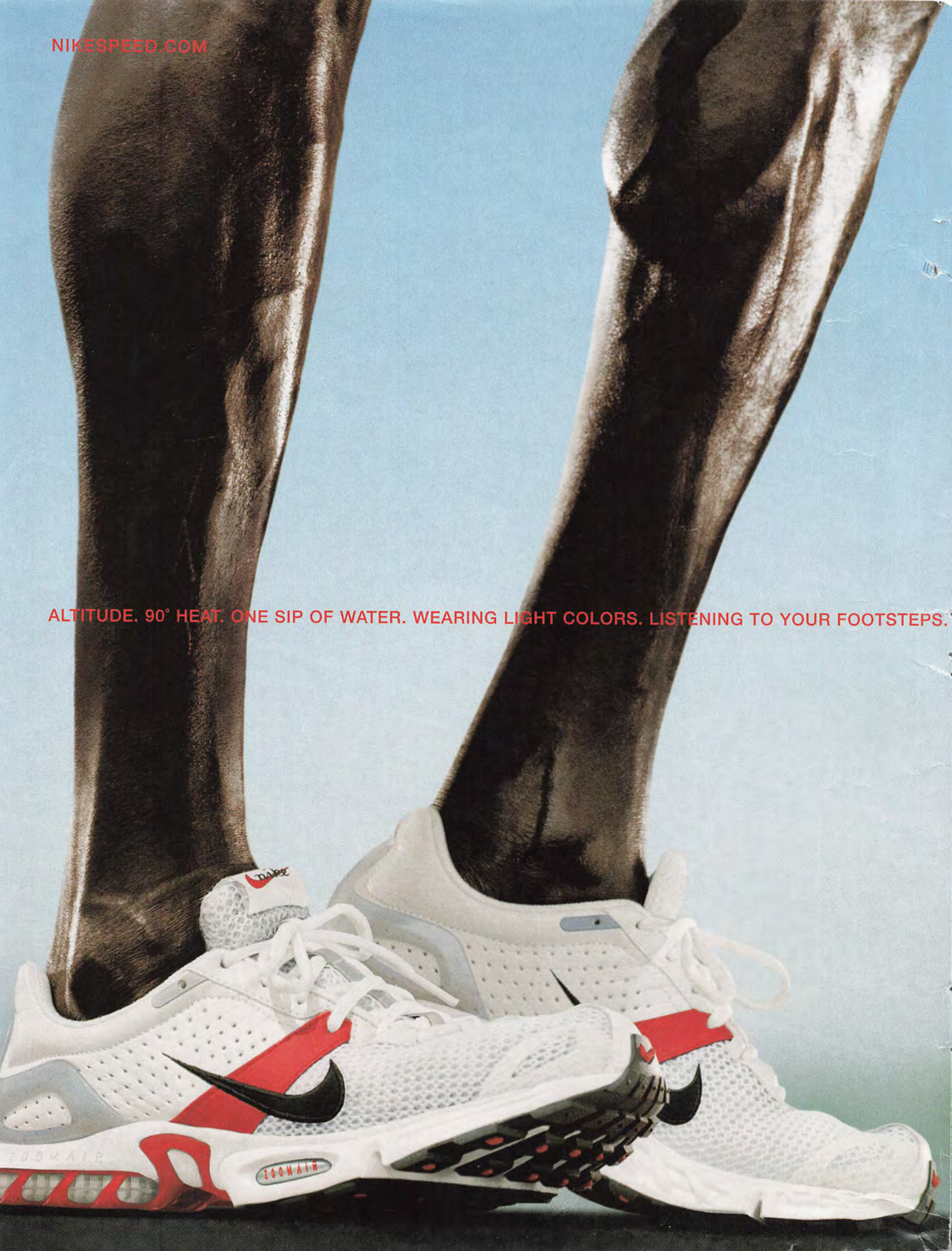
NFL PREVIEW

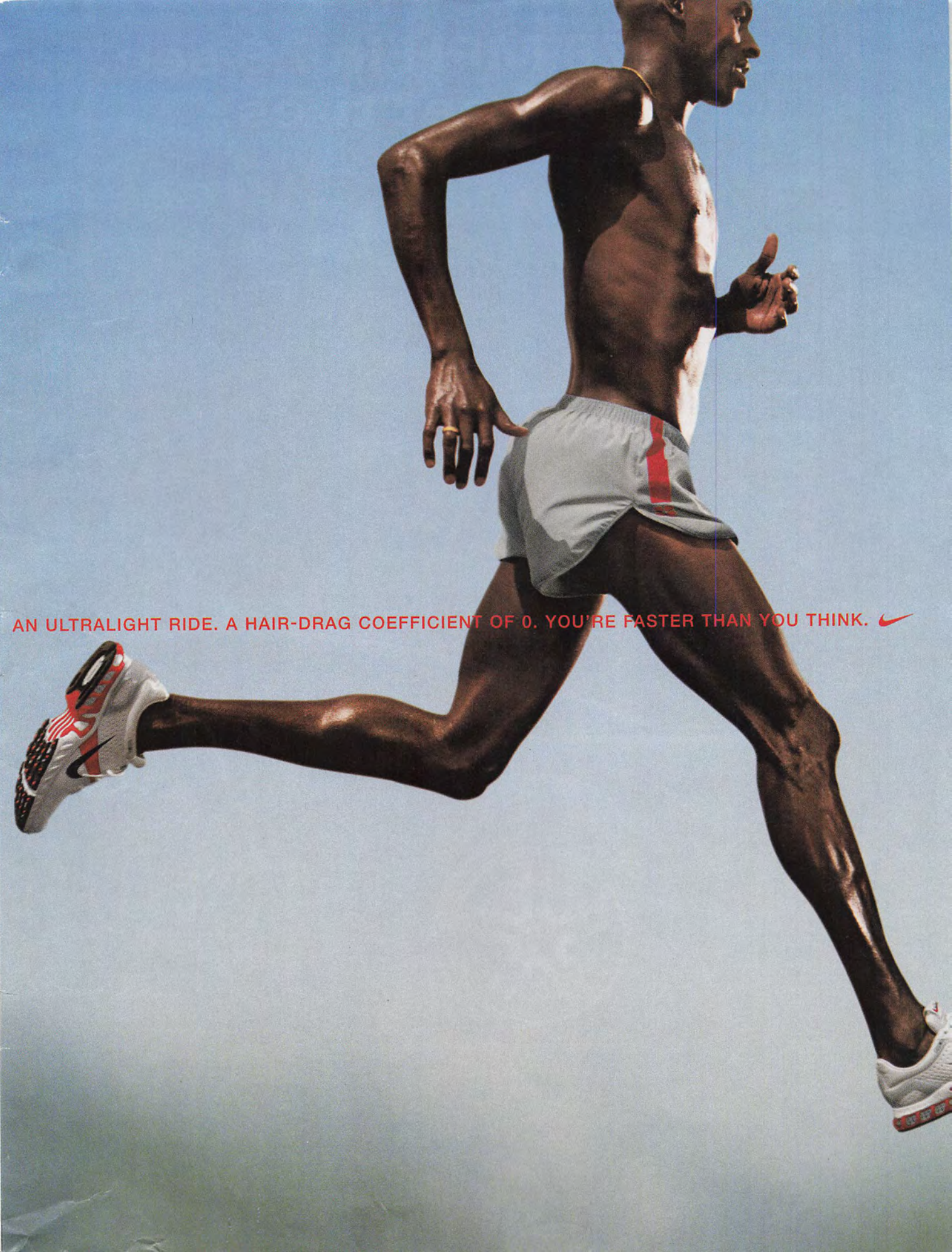
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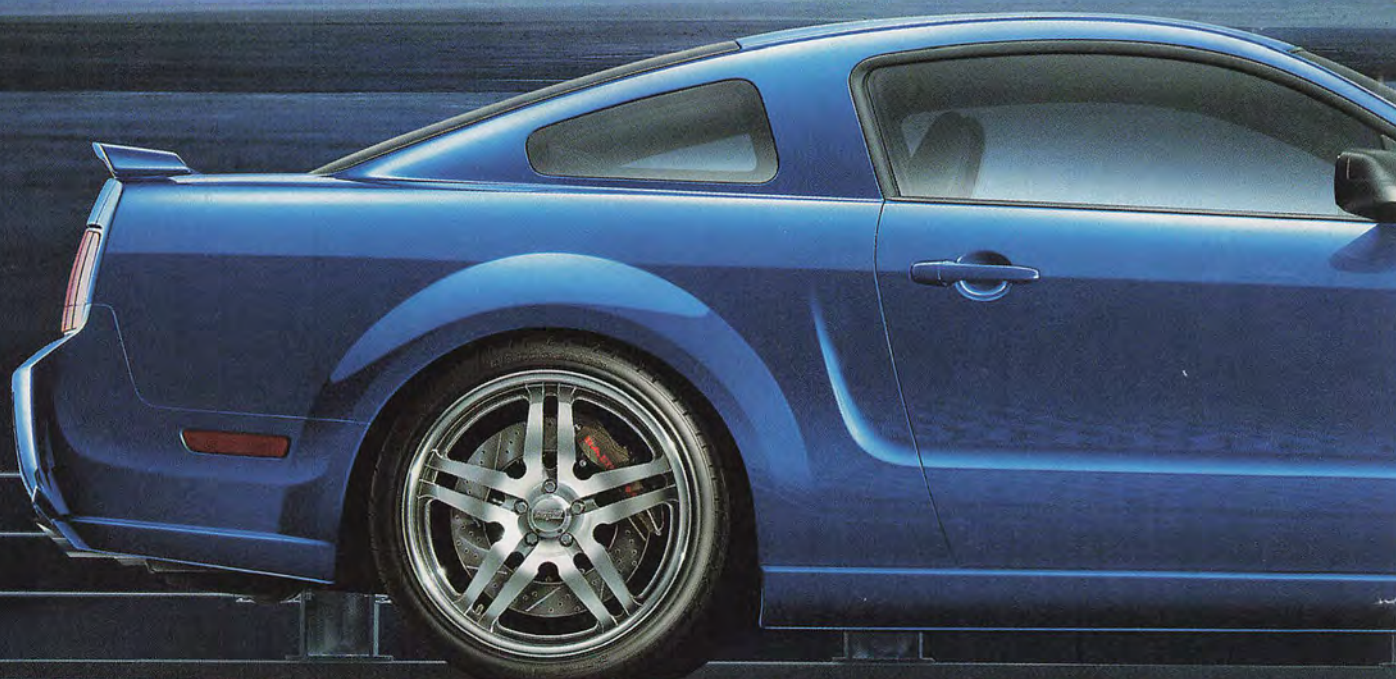
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1- Guttridge made a pass at 7.98 seconds on January 29, 2004 at a track in Bradenton, Florida, but because this was not set during a race, it is not an official world record.





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INSET PHOTO: JOHN BIEVER
COVER FLAP PHOTOS: DAVID E. KLUTHO (BRONCOS); DAMIAN STROHMAYER (EAGLES); SIMON BRUTY (SEAHAWKS); JOHN BIEVER (VIKINGS)

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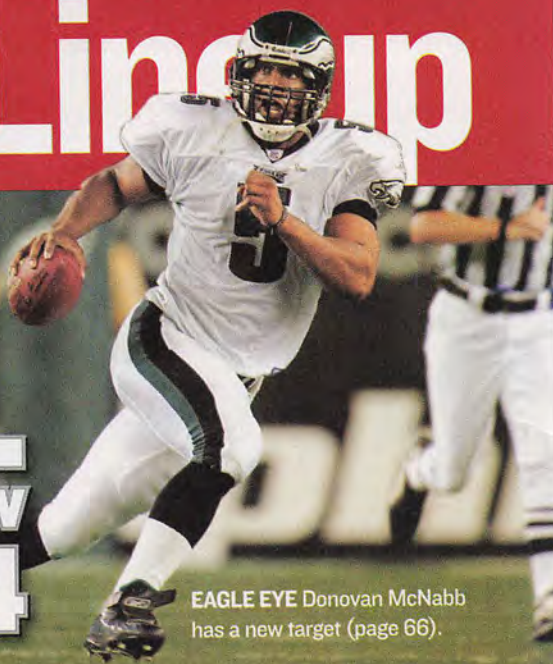
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The Lineup

DOUBLE ISSUE

NFL PREVIEW 2004

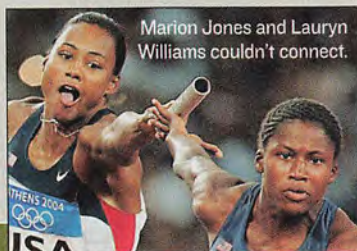


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Marion Jones and Lauryn Williams couldn't connect.

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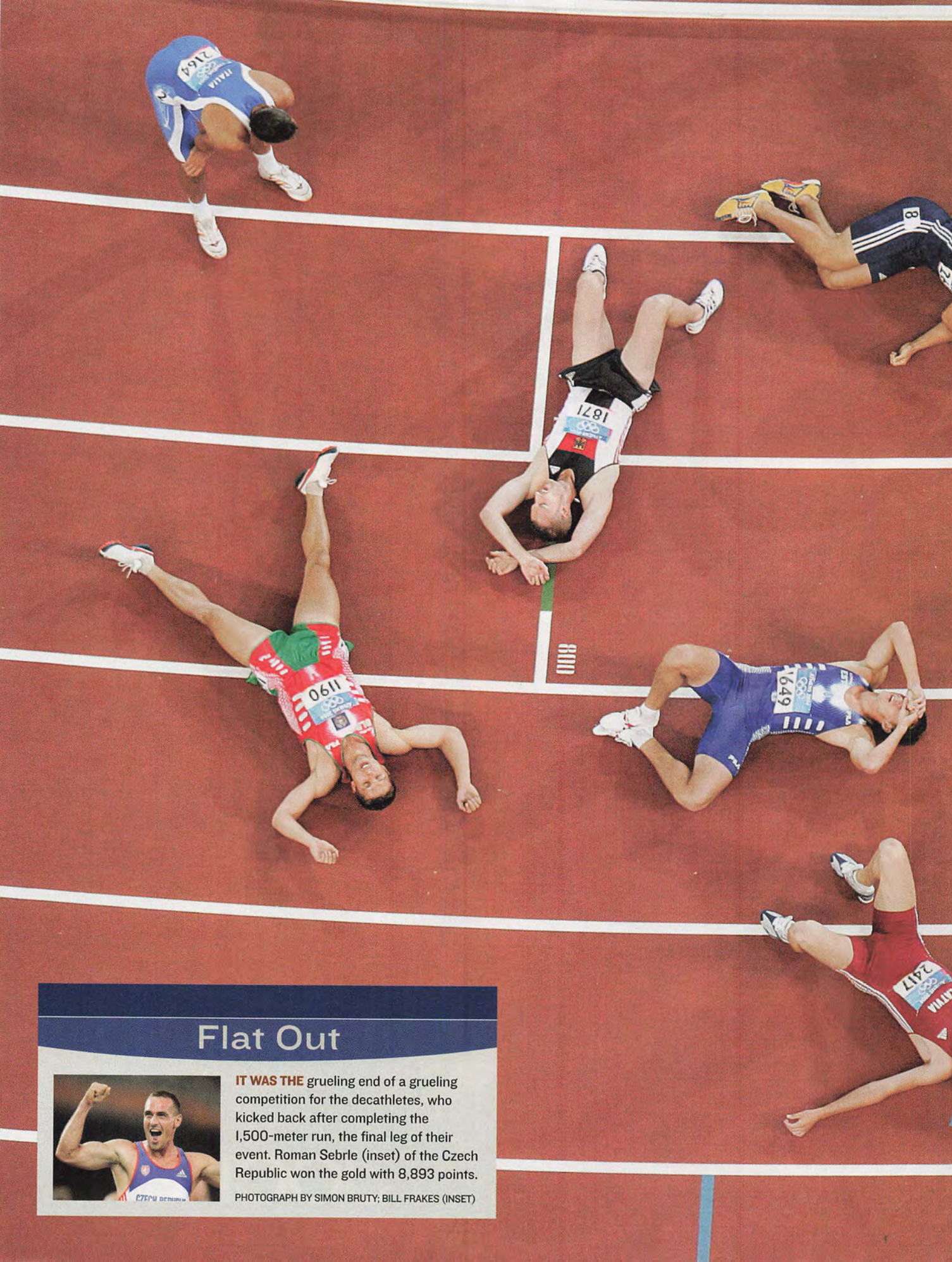
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Flat Out



IT WAS THE grueling end of a grueling competition for the decathletes, who kicked back after completing the 1,500-meter run, the final leg of their event. Roman Sebrle (inset) of the Czech Republic won the gold with 8,893 points.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON BRUTY; BILL FRAKES (INSET)

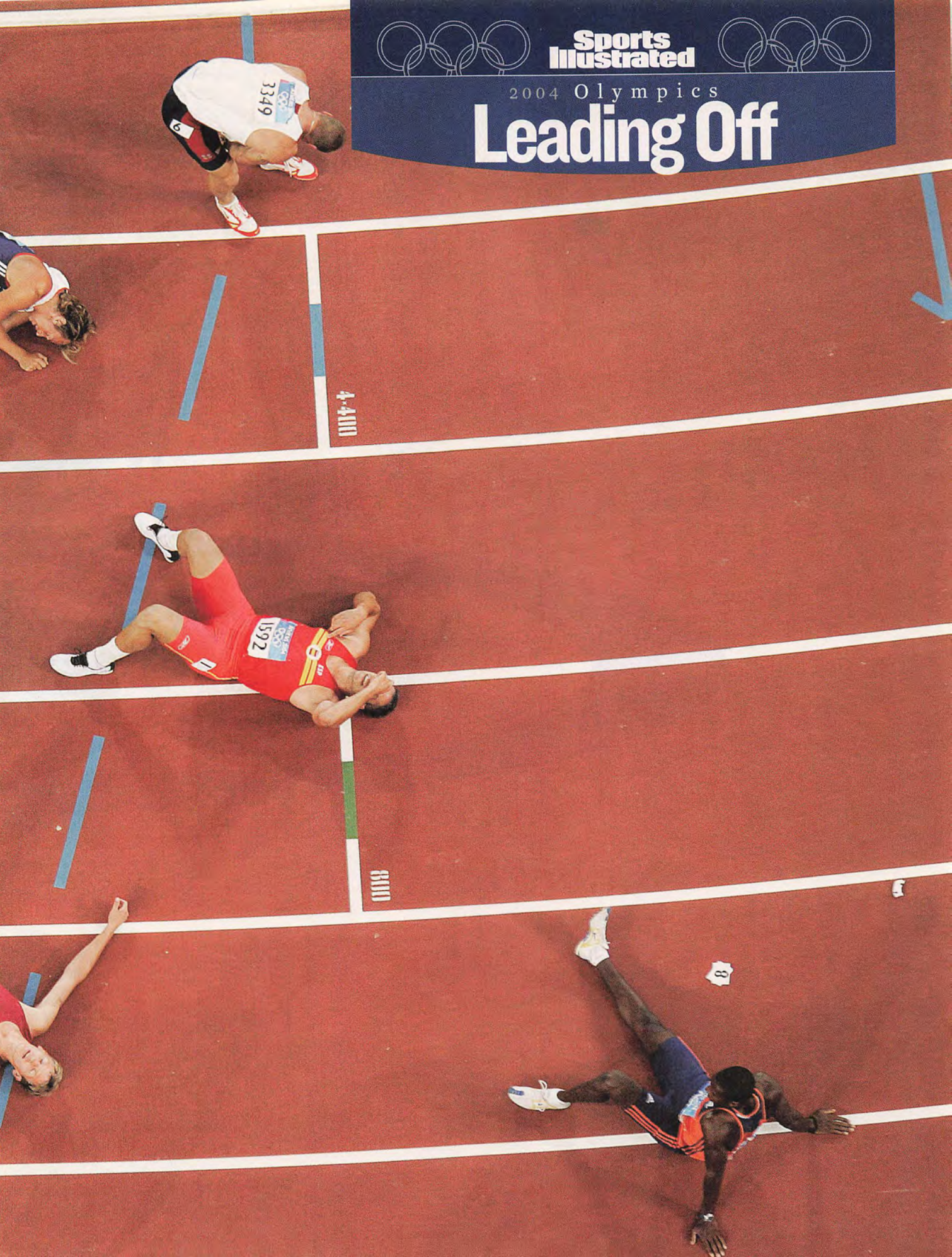


**Sports
Illustrated**



2004 Olympics

Leading Off



PROFESSIONAL





Leading Off Stepping Down



WITH THE TRADITIONAL sign-off for a retiring wrestler, U.S. super heavyweight Rulon Gardner, a surprise gold medalist in Sydney, bid farewell after taking a bronze in Athens on Aug. 25. Gardner plans to spread the gospel of physical fitness.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LYNN JOHNSON

Leading Off Face Facts

YOU DON'T HAVE to read the agate type to know how each of these athletes felt about his or her Olympic moment. Hicham El Guerrouj, for instance, looks as if the weight of the world has been lifted from his shoulders after finally winning a gold in the 1,500m, while Yao Ming can't hide his disappointment with China's play in basketball.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN BIEVER, SIMON BRUTY, BILL FRAKES, LYNN JOHNSON, HEINZ KLUETMEIER, BOB MARTIN, PETER READ MILLER, JOHN W. McDONOUGH, BOB ROSATO AND AL TIELEMANS



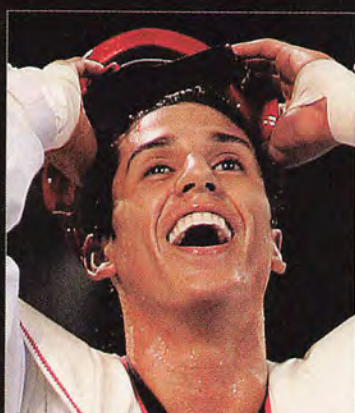
YURIY BORZAKOVSKIY, Russia
Track



ABBY WAMBACH, U.S.
Soccer



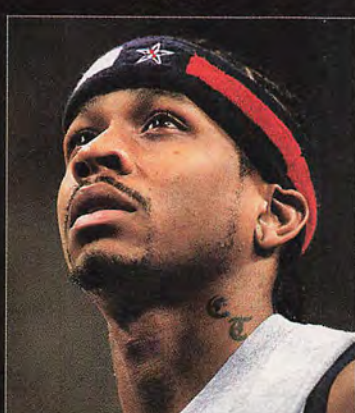
SONIA BISSET, Cuba
Track



STEVEN LOPEZ, U.S.
Taekwondo



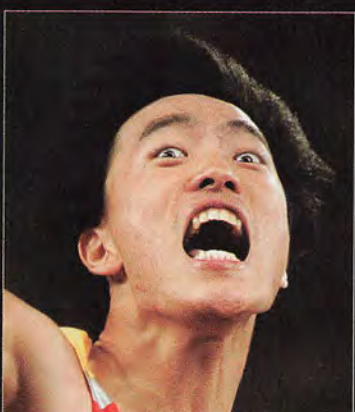
OANA MIHAELA BAN, Romania
Gymnastics



ALLEN IVERSON, U.S.
Basketball



GARY HALL JR., U.S.
Swimming



LIU XIANG, China
Track



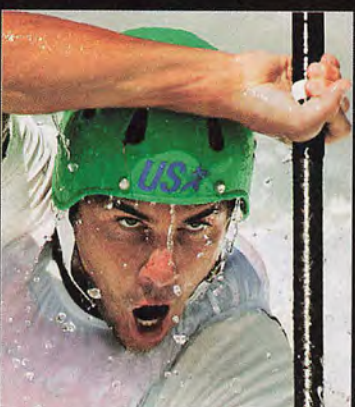
FANI HALKIÁ, Greece
Track



LISA LESLIE, U.S.
Basketball



ALEEN BAILEY, Jamaica
Track



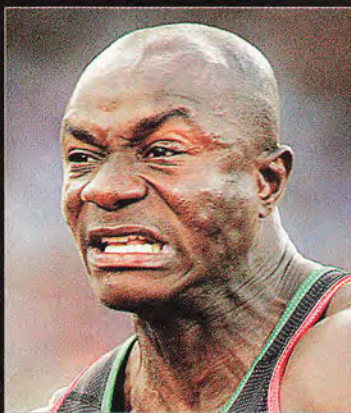
SCOTT PARSONS, U.S.
Kayak



TINA THOMPSON, U.S.
Basketball



COURTNEY KUPETS, U.S.
Gymnastics



AZIZ ZAKARI, *Ghana*
Track



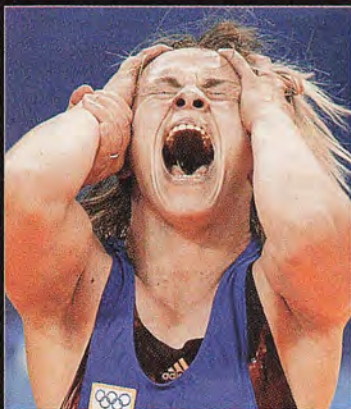
COURTNEY MCCOOL, *U.S.*
Gymnastics



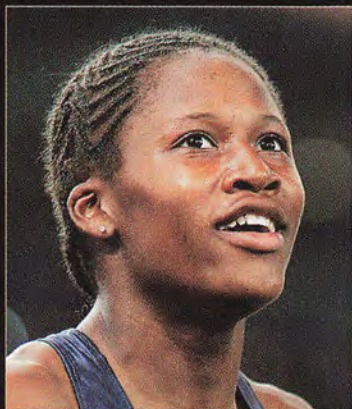
LISA FERNANDEZ, *U.S.*
Softball



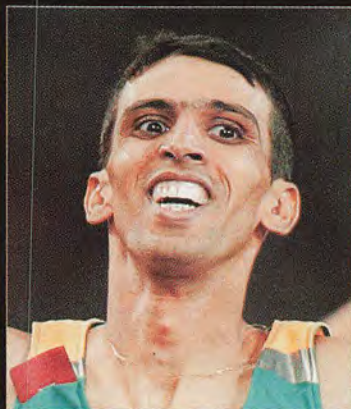
MICHAEL PHELPS, *U.S.*
Swimming



IRINI MERLENI, *Ukraine*
Wrestling



LAURYN WILLIAMS, *U.S.*
Track



HICHAM EL GUERROUJ, *Morocco*
Track



STANISLAVA KOMAROVA, *Russia*
Swimming



ANNA PAVLOVA, *Russia*
Gymnastics



LYNDON FERNS, *South Africa*
Swimming



ADAM NELSON, *U.S.*
Shot Put



YELENA ISINBAYEVA, *Russia*
Pole Vault



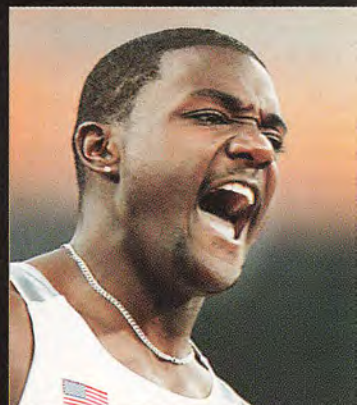
TOM PAPPAS, *U.S.*
Decathlon



AGATA WROBEL, *Poland*
Weightlifting



AMANDA BEARD, *U.S.*
Swimming



JUSTIN GATLIN, *U.S.*
Track



YULIYA NESTERENKO, Belarus
Track



KATIE HOFF, U.S.
Swimming



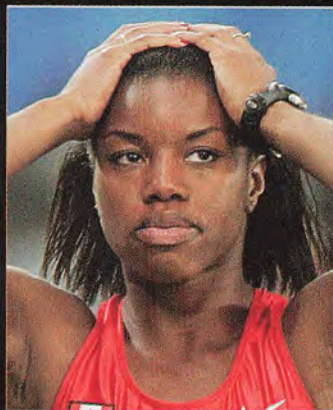
MISTY MAY & KERRI WALSH, U.S.
Beach Volleyball



SVETLANA KHORKINA, Russia
Gymnastics



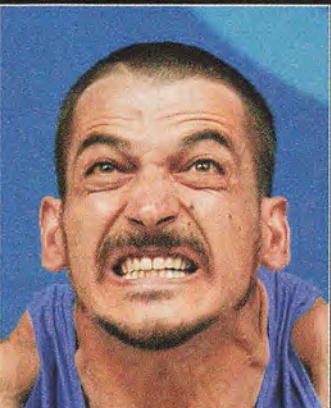
IAN THORPE, Australia
Swimming



PERDITA FELICIEN, Canada
Track



SHAWN CRAWFORD, U.S.
Track



PYRROS DIMAS, Greece
Weightlifting



INGE DE BRUIJN, the Netherlands
Swimming



BRANDI CHASTAIN, U.S.
Soccer



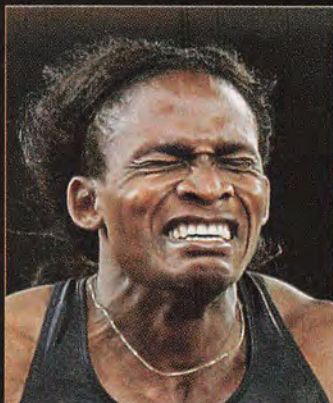
PAUL HAMM, U.S.
Gymnastics



YAO MING, China
Basketball



KOSUKE KITAJIMA, Japan
Swimming

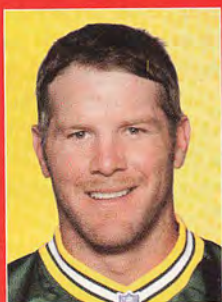


MARIA MUTOLA, Mozambique
Track

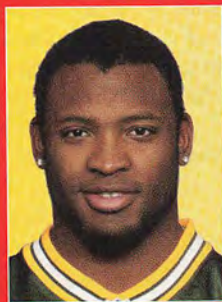


ULRIKE URBANSKY, Germany
Track

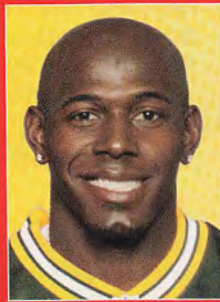
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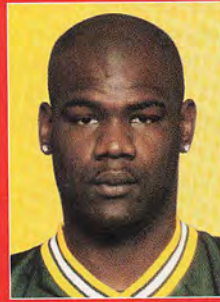
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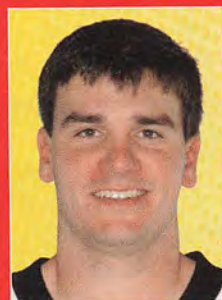
DONALD DRIVER



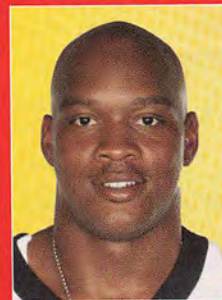
BUBBA FRANKS



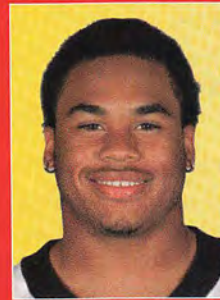
AL HARRIS



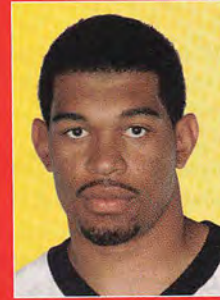
JAKE DELHOMME



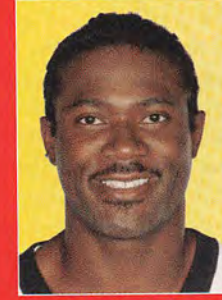
STEPHEN DAVIS



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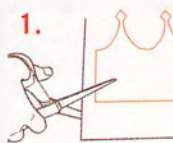
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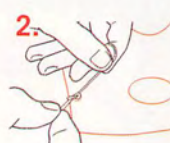


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School Letters

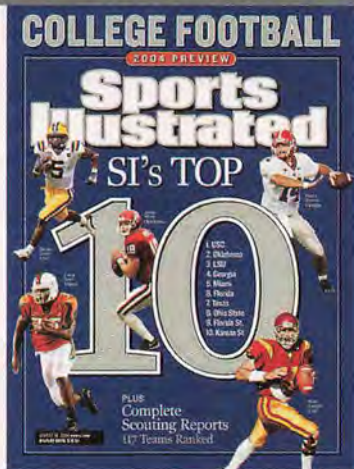
Kudos to SI for another insightful College Football Preview (Aug. 16). Although I agree that a loaded Oklahoma team warrants a No. 2 preseason ranking, I take issue with your statement that the "Sooners should breeze through September and be 4-0." An intriguing bump in the road presents itself on Sept. 18, when the Oregon Ducks—No. 18 in your preseason rankings—visit Norman. The Ducks were a late addition to Oklahoma's schedule, designed to boost OU's strength of schedule. Although that variable has been removed from the BCS formula, Kellen Clemens and the Quack Attack may just throw a monkey wrench into the Sooners' best-laid plans for 2004.

Chris Stiles, Bloomington, Ill.

Eight months ago the Mid-American Conference closed the book on the most successful season in its 57-year history with a pair of bowl wins and two teams in the top 25 of the final AP poll, but none of that seems to matter to SI. I was appalled that only two MAC teams made even your top 69 and that the conference that you touted so highly last year (*A Big MAC Attack*, Sept. 29; *Unknown, Undefeated*, Oct. 13) received such little respect from your prognosticators.

Matt LaWell, Athens, Ohio

USC ranked No. 1? USC does not play anyone that is ranked in SI's top 20. LSU, on the other hand, plays two teams



ranked in the top 10 and one team ranked No. 13. Step up to the plate USC. Strength of schedule does matter.

Alan Burns
New Orleans

I realize that most people's interest lies with the 117 Division I-A football schools, many of whose players are enrolled primarily to prepare for the NFL.

However, to completely overlook the more than 400 schools who compete in Divisions I-AA, II and III seems like a slap in the face to those student-athletes. (Yes, most of them are students first.)

Gary Ciba, Phoenix

Trace on the Case

Alan Shipnuck forgot to give proper credit to Los Angeles Dodgers manager Jim Tracy (*A Blue Streak*, Aug. 16). Trace has been there for his players and is well respected by baseball people, and the Dodgers have been in the race for the playoffs in all four of his seasons as manager. Give Trace his due. If the Dodgers weren't doing well, everyone would blame the manager.

Marty Mayer, Somerset, Ky.

Untrue North

As a below-the-line technician, I find it hard to believe that Peter Farrelly, a well-established director of megamoney movies has no say in where he can shoot his film about a Red Sox-obsessed fan (*SCORECARD*, Aug. 16). Shooting "the ultimate Red Sox movie" in Toronto makes as much sense as shooting an American Civil War film in Europe.

Dan Kerns, Burbank, Calif.

Bodies of Water

I have endured many photos of football linemen and golfers. Now, finally, an article on men's water polo, the sport with the most spectacular physiques—and you give me three photos of the 56-year-old coach (*Pooling Resources*, Aug. 16). Certainly after publishing so many swimsuit issues, you could have provided your female readers with some eye candy.

Kristen Ruby, Visalia, Calif.

77-0

John Ed Bradley's first line summed it up well: *It Was an Ugly Day* (Aug. 16). It was a sickening day. As I was watching the game on TV, at times I felt compelled to stand as the 12th man, hoping that I might somehow send a little bit of psychic energy to help the Texas A&M football team compete with Oklahoma. I'm guessing there were other Aggies who were doing the same thing. No one ever said it was easy being an Aggie, but it's who I am. It's who I always will be.

Bob Boeker, Sherman, Texas

Bradley's article on the 77-0 Texas A&M loss to Oklahoma sort of makes you feel sorry for the poor Aggies, unless you happen to remember that less than a month before their worst football loss ever, they whipped up on the Baylor Bears 73-10 in front of a very happy Kyle Field crowd. What goes around, comes around.

Mike O'Connell, Friendswood, Texas

Most people who have competed in sports have experienced those nightmarish games that you just want to end. In a culture that typically equates glory with victory, it was good to read about the team on the other end of a blowout.

Bill Pavuk, Chatfield, Ohio

Remember the Flyers

I noticed in the *5 Minute Guide to the Season* (Aug. 16) that you listed the Texas Longhorns as having scored in 278 consecutive games, the nation's longest streak. As impressive as that is, the Dayton Flyers, a I-AA nonscholarship program for the past 12 years, after playing in Division III, have not been shut out in 311 games, the longest active streak in college football. (BYU held the record until being shut out last season.) The Flyers were last blanked in 1976, against Marshall, and have averaged 32.8 points a game during the streak. It's time to give the Flyers their due.

Mark Malzewski, Fairfield, Conn.



STREAKING Not shut out in 311 straight games.

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LETTERS

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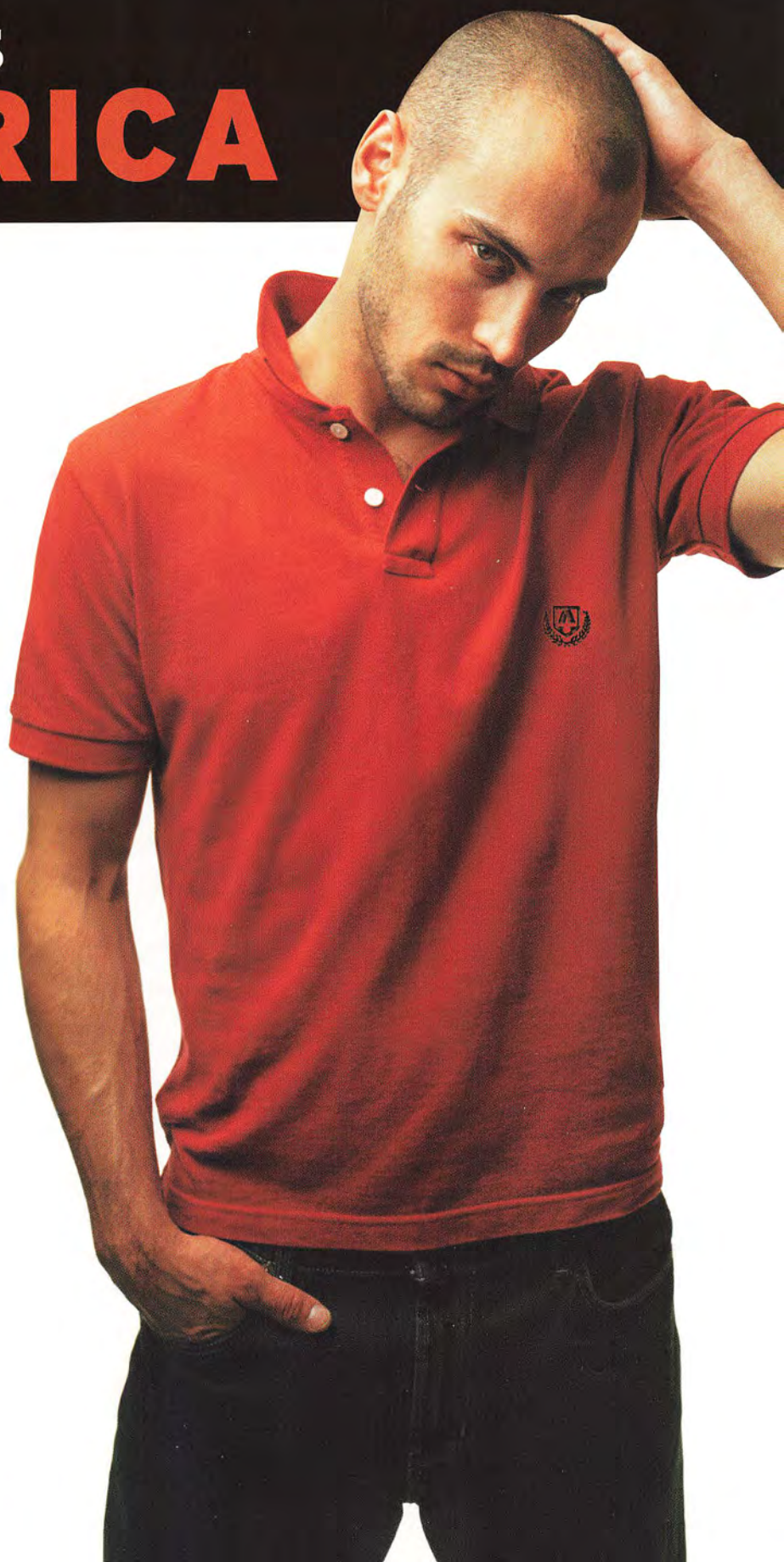
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Fatter, Blanker, Cleaner

by Steve Rushin



IN THE center of Athens, overlooking the Temple of Zeus, is another ancient anachronism called the Athens Tennis Club, which was converted during the 17 days just past into the Olympians Reunion Center, a private—and very exclusive—lounge open only to athletes who have competed in the Games. Inside, at the bar, Zola Budd

might bump into Mary Decker (so to speak), while Eddie the Eagle and Eric the Eel might play canasta beneath a ceiling fan.

"I just met five other athletes from the Montreal Games," said Gail Marquis (U.S. women's basketball, '76) while on her way out, after introducing herself to my wife, Rebecca Lobo (U.S. women's basketball, '96), who was on her way in. And so it went every night until the club's 2 a.m. closing time, after which, one imagined, U.S. high jumper Dwight Stones would have to vault the fence to get in and Russian strongman Vasily Alexeyev would be wearily deadlifting sofas for the cleaning women to vacuum underneath.

The club is, like so many other aspects of the Olympics, a capital idea, and one that ought to be implemented immediately in American sports. Imagine a National Baseball Clubhouse for anyone who has ever played in the big leagues: George Brett behind the bar, wiping out beer glasses with a pine-tar rag.

But then, so many features of the Games will be missed as we return to our games. It's not the Olympic ideals that need spreading in America, it's the Olympic *ideas*. Like no ads. When you've spent three weeks in arenas bereft of rotating billboards, it's hard to return to Lincoln Financial Field. At the Olympics, even the blimps are a blank and generic off-white, like the BEFORE pictures in an episode of *Pimp My Blimp*.

It's not just fewer ads. American sports could use fewer *abs*. The strongest athletes at the Olympics—weightlifters—all had massive beer guts. (Many tested positive, presumably for Schlitz.) In America, even pro golfers are skinny enough to grace the spine of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*. But the body types at the Olympics were refreshingly manifold. The Games often seemed a parade of paunches (Iranian weightlifter Hossein Rezazadeh evidently trains at a Tehran Taco Bell), butts (Greek hurdler Fani Halkia is the unholy offspring of J. Lo and Flo-Jo) and mixed nuts. (The spectator who jumped from the springboard in a tutu and polka-dot tights pointed up another aspect gone missing in America: spontaneity.)

But there's so much more we need to borrow. In Athens all the athletes' quotes were translated into English, a service sorely missed Stateside by anyone who has interviewed Bobby Bowden.

And the vast majority of athletes' tattoos were temporary—press-on flag transfers available on every other block in Athens—so that the Old Glory on your biceps, which now ripples in a stiff

breeze, won't hang limply at half-staff in your middle age. By contrast, U.S. basketball players will look, in their dotage, like crumpled Rand McNally road maps.

All sports would be improved if fewer athletes left school early to pursue the limelight and instead left the limelight early to pursue school. They do the latter at the Olympics. Twenty-four hours after winning the softball gold medal in Athens, Cat Osterman said cheerily, at a swank seaside party, "I have to go back in the morning. School starts at Texas." She's only the best curveball pitcher in the *world*.

As the NFL season opens, and we brace for that first batch of "We'll get 'em next time" platitudes from Week 1 losers, the Olympics remind us that every contest counts, or ought to. Which is why the despondent Japanese silver medalist in women's wrestling said afterward, "I lost because I lacked courage." Wouldn't you like to hear that, just once, from a tearful Red Sox reliever?

Speaking of baseball, with its five-strikes-and-we-suspend-your-parking-privileges drug plan, the Olympics actively *pursue*, rather than protect, their drug cheats. In all, 26 athletes who qualified for Athens tested positive, missed drug tests or failed to produce

enough urine for a test, and seven of them were stripped of their medals with the sound of ripping Velcro. Their revoked credentials were then displayed for the cameras like scalps.

There's a healthy absence of idolatry at the Olympics, perhaps because athletes are everywhere. You see Sarah Hughes crossing a street here, Carly Patterson hailing a cab there and—seated across from you at

Stout stars,
ad-free blimps
and aggressive
drug testing are
Olympic features
that should come
to America.

a table in a tent, his cellphone ringing like a fire alarm—Michael Phelps. The Olympics turned all of Athens into an Olympians Reunion Center, like one of those paintings you see in diners in which Elvis, Brando, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and a hundred other icons are all packed into the same small frame.

When's the last time you saw A-Rod at the A&P? The Olympics, for all their bloat, are still on a human scale. Before winning their own gold medal, the U.S. women's basketball players watched from the upper reaches of Karaiskaki Stadium as the U.S. women's soccer team played for gold. Hoops star Diana Taurasi cheered soccer star Mia Hamm for 90 minutes, and—when the tie game paused for a brief intermission before extra time—a casual fan wondered aloud what came next. Taurasi replied, like an eight-year-old girl, "Oranges!"

Sports are, after all, still child's play. It doesn't hurt to remember that as football season starts. While looking forward to the Orange Bowl, let's not forget about the oranges. □

A photograph of three U.S. Olympic Swimmers: Brendan Hansen, Aaron Peirsol, and Amanda Beard. They are posed against a blue background. Brendan Hansen is on the left, shirtless, with his arms crossed. Aaron Peirsol is in the center, shirtless, looking directly at the camera. Amanda Beard is on the right, wearing a blue and white patterned swimsuit, looking directly at the camera.

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► U.S. Swim Team members Brendan Hansen, Aaron Peirsol, Amanda Beard, Lenny Krayzelburg, Michael Phelps and Ian Crocker.



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SCORE

The Science of the

Kobe Bryant's sexual-assault trial is sure to have its He-Said-She-Said moments. But the story

AFTER MONTHS of sparring, media spinning and nearly unanimous predictions that the trial would never happen, jury selection began last Friday in the Kobe Bryant sexual-assault case in Eagle, Colo. SI has seen previously undisclosed documents, which, in conjunction with court transcripts and interviews, are the basis for this report of how the trial may unfold.

Like most acquaintance rape cases, this one involves a man and a woman who entered a room, only to emerge with diametrically opposed versions of what happened there. The accuser's testimony will be the centerpiece of the state's case. But the physical evidence—genital injuries, blood and DNA—as well as Bryant's lengthy police statement will be crucial to both sides. Collection of this evidence began on July 1, 2003, about 12 hours after the incident, when Detective Doug Winters from the Eagle County Sheriff's Office and Deputy Marsha Rich went to the home of a 19-year-old college freshman to investigate her report of a sexual assault. Questioning the woman in the presence of her parents, Winters and Rich learned the man she was accusing was Kobe Bryant. The officers asked for the clothing she had worn the night before. Winters noticed what appeared to be a blood stain on a pair of purple panties. The officers took the woman and her clothing to the sheriff's office, where she gave a detailed videotaped statement.

Next her parents drove her to Valley View Hospital, where two nurses trained in sexual-assault cases conducted a rape-kit exam. SI has learned the exam revealed "multiple lacerations" and "bruises" between the vagina and anal opening. The nurses, noting the subject had not showered or douched since the encounter, described the injuries as genital "trauma" inconsistent with consensual sex.

Investigators then went to question Bryant, arriving at the Lodge & Spa at Cordillera, where the woman worked, roughly 24 hours after the alleged assault. Without receiving a Miranda warning or consulting a lawyer, Bryant spoke for 75 minutes to Winters and his partner, Dan Loya, who, unbeknownst to Bryant, had activated a concealed tape recorder. Most of the conversation has been admitted into evidence

by trial judge Terry Ruckriegle. According to a report made available to SI, Bryant acknowledged talking with the woman. He told police they "shot the s---" but denied having sex with her. After the detectives said they had evidence to the contrary, Bryant admitted that he did have sex with the woman but denied any use of force. When asked how he knew the woman wanted to have sex, Bryant said he could tell from the look she gave him. Then he discussed with investigators something his accuser had not: oral sex. (The accuser told nurses at the hospital, who later told investigators, that Bryant made her kiss his penis and that she washed her face before leaving the room.)

In his interview with the detectives, Bryant remained cooperative and polite but expressed fears that his wife would find out about the incident and that it could ruin his career. When asked if he would pay his accuser to make the allegation go away, Bryant said that he would. After the interview, when the detectives executed a search warrant, Bryant took off his T-shirt, saying it was the same one he'd worn the previous night. It contained three smears of blood around the waist area. The officers then took Bryant to Valley View Hospital, where he provided body fluid samples and had his penis and other body parts swabbed. He was arrested two days later.

Whether Bryant testifies will probably not be determined until the prosecution rests. But despite his lawyers' efforts to have his statement and bloody shirt excluded, Ruckriegle deemed them admissible. Prosecutors will attempt to link the shirt to the injuries detected during the rape-kit exam. Those injuries are similar to the ones used as evidence by Greg Garrison when he successfully prosecuted Mike Tyson in Indianapolis in 1992 for raping a college freshman who willingly went to his hotel room and later said she was assaulted. Like Garrison, Colorado prosecutors will present graphic exhibits and medical testimony that the injuries are not consistent with consensual sex. Bryant's lawyers may try to minimize the injuries, but they are more likely to try to raise doubts about who caused them and use complicated DNA evidence to suggest it was someone other than Bryant. (The validity and admissibility of that evidence was chal-



CARD

Sports Illustrated

Edited by
Mark Bechtel
and Stephen Cannella

"Excitement spread to the Braves' clubhouse where Curaçao native Andruw Jones followed the kids on TV."

—ISLE OF MIGHT, PAGE 28

Brief Encounter

told by blood stains, body fluids and other physical evidence may decide his fate **By Jeff Benedict**

lenged by prosecutors last week, but Ruckriegle had not ruled on the issue when SI went to press.)

When Bryant's accuser underwent her medical exam, swabs were taken from her vagina and thighs. Also, fabric samples were taken from the yellow underpants she wore to the exam and the purple pair worn during her encounter with Bryant. Initially, this evidence was analyzed by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation at the crime lab in Denver, which found that the pair worn to the exam contained a semen stain belonging to a man other than Bryant.

The defense subsequently ran its own forensic tests on the underwear and the swabs collected from the accuser. The analysis was performed by a private lab in Ventura, Calif., operated by Marc Taylor, a former L.A. Medical Examiner's Office criminalist who worked as an expert witness for the O.J. Simpson defense team. Taylor's lab reported that it found sperm from a man other than Bryant—identified as Mr. X—in both pairs of the accuser's underwear and on the swabs taken from her body.

At a closed-door hearing on June 21 and 22, DNA expert Elizabeth Johnson testified for the defense that the accuser's sexual contact with Mr. X "likely occurred after [the accuser] and Mr. Bryant were together." Johnson testified that no traces of Mr. X's DNA were detected on the swabs taken from Bryant or the T-shirt he wore. Johnson said that had Mr. X's sperm been on the accuser at the time of her encounter with Bryant, it should have shown up on Bryant.

Based on the publicly released DNA evidence in the case, Ronald Singer, president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and Alan Keel, a criminalist and DNA expert, both told SI that Johnson's argument that Mr. X's fluids were deposited on the woman after her encounter with Bryant raises serious questions.

The accuser told investigators that she had sex about three days before meeting Bryant but no sex between that encounter and her exam. It has been reported that the DNA on the purple panties establishes that the accuser had sexual contact soon after her encounter with Bryant, but prosecutors have filed a document that says cotton cloth

can retain semen even after it has been repeatedly "soaked or washed."

This does not explain sperm and semen on the swabs from the woman's body, but SI has learned that besides being a small sample, the DNA from Mr. X consisted of only the portions of sperm that remain after it has degraded over time. "Generally, when degraded sperm is all you see, it means several days have gone by," said Singer.

The responsibility for explaining this and rebutting Johnson's conclusions will likely fall to Dr. Henry Lee, the criminalist who, along with Marc Taylor, worked for the Simpson defense. But in the Bryant case Lee will testify for the prosecution, while Taylor is working for the defense.

What is Lee likely to say? He may make the point, as both DNA experts interviewed by SI did, that the small amount of sperm from Mr. X is inconsistent with a sexual encounter after one with Bryant. Keel and Singer also agree that semen swabbed from her leg could have been deposited there before she met Bryant—"but that presumes she didn't shower during that time," said Keel. Lee is also likely to attack the integrity of the defense's DNA analysis.

Although DNA has dominated the pretrial coverage, "this case could hinge on the blood," Singer says, referring to the fact that the stains on Bryant's T-shirt (and on the purple panties) were the accuser's blood. "Her blood on his T-shirt indicates

her injuries were caused or reopened by him." There are two likely causes for vaginal bleeding: menstruation and trauma. Records obtained by SI indicate the accuser's period concluded nine days before her encounter with Bryant. "In cases of acquaintance rape, the presence of blood evidence is a touchdown for prosecutors," says Garrison, who did not have such evidence when he prosecuted Tyson.

Bryant's defense lawyers have attempted to admit evidence of the accuser's sexual history, but the judge has limited that to the 72 hours preceding her rape-kit exam. Garrison points out that all the pretrial publicity about the accuser's sex life may hurt her reputation but could help the state's case. "If she is sexually active," explained Garrison, "she is not going to hurt and bleed if she had consensual sex with Kobe. You only bleed if you don't want it to happen."

**Though DNA
has dominated
the coverage,
"this case
could hinge on
the blood."**

THE SHOW

BY BILL SCHEFT

WELL, THE Republican Convention is winding down. Are you like me? Are you waiting for John Kerry to hire Butch Harmon to work on the swing states?

COLIN POWELL CANCELS TRIP TO OLYMPICS He was too busy trying to build a coalition of support for Larry Brown's roster selections.

See the closing ceremonies? I thought this was nice. The Greek team chipped in and bought the pregnant woman with the glowing belly a car seat.

NBC kept the cross-promotion going to the very end. Twice, I could have sworn I saw Matt LeBlanc toweling off on the 10-meter platform.

GYMNASTICS SCORING CONTROVERSY CONTINUES Poor Paul Hamm. First he has to share a womb, now this.

The International Gymnastics Federation requested Hamm give up his gold medal in the all-around, but it was turned down flat by USOC chairman Peter Ueberroth. I hope the expression "Go take a flying FIG" was in there somewhere.

The request came from FIG president Bruno Grandi. I think I know his superior, Bruno Vent.

For those who don't remember Ueberroth, he rose to prominence when he turned a \$225 million profit on the 1984 Games. Of course, the net profit was \$24 million after they paid Carl Lewis's hair, makeup and wardrobe people.

Elsewhere, the U.S. had its lowest number of

boxing medalists since 1948. Ladies and gentlemen, this is serious. Where is Don King supposed to find his future plaintiffs?

RICKY WILLIAMS CALLS DOLPHINS Don't get excited. He's not coming back, he just wanted to know if any linemen were holding.

Ricky was in Australia when he called the Dolphins. All I have is the punch line: "Oh, I thought you said Great Barrier Reefer!"

Paul Tagliabue issued a memo mandating that teams be more specific when reporting injuries. Which raises the question: Do you want to read anything more specific than "questionable (groin)"?

HOCKEY WORLD CUP BEGINS

Everybody is getting ready for the lockout. Starting Sept. 20, the Ice Capades will allow fighting.

FENWAY PARK BANS DEROGATORY T-SHIRTS

Red Sox fans will be asked to turn the shirts inside out, or get a marker and write ALLEGEDLY in between YANKEES and SUCK.

JURY SELECTION BEGINS IN KOBE BRYANT TRIAL

Prospective jurors have to fill out a questionnaire. The first question: "(Select one) William Kennedy Smith: Misunderstood or dreamy?"

My time is up. You've been great. Enjoy Shocking Blue.

Bill Scheft plans to promote five jokes from the PCL after Sept. 1.



GO FIGURE

15:59 Time, in hours and minutes, it took retired American Airlines pilot George Brunstad, 70, to swim from Dover, England, to Sangatte, France, on Sunday, making him the oldest swimmer to cross the English Channel.

0 Number of men's Olympic basketball teams in the I2-nation tournament that shot at least 75% from the free throw line.

6 Number of women's Olympic basketball teams in the I2-nation tournament that shot at least 75% from the free throw line.

40 Combined age of Devil Rays pitcher Scott Kazmir and shortstop B.J. Upton, the first major league teammates aged 20 or younger since 1993.

44 Consecutive games without a loss by Arsenal, which last lost in May 2003, a record for English soccer's top flight.

126 Games Mariners rightfielder Ichiro Suzuki needed to reach 200 hits this season, the fewest since the Giants' Bill Terry took 119 and the Phillies' Chuck Klein took 125 in 1930.

4 Two-hundred-hit seasons for Ichiro, the first player ever to reach that plateau in the first four years of his career.

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF WONG

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Tiger Woods

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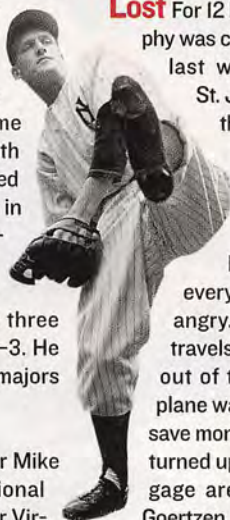
FOR THE RECORD

Died At age 88, Hank Borowy, the losing pitcher in the Cubs' last World Series game. The righthander, who started the 1944 All-Star Game for the American League, was sold by the Yankees to Chicago midway through the '45 season for \$97,500. He went 11-2 for the Cubs and shut out Detroit on six hits in Game 1 of the World Series, at Tiger Stadium. He was the loser in Game 5, then came back the next day to win Game 6 with four innings of shutout relief and asked manager Charlie Grimm to start him in Game 7 on one day's rest. In a decision Cubs fans still rue, Grimm consented. Borowy (*right*) was pulled after giving up singles to the first three Tigers he faced, and Detroit won 9-3. He retired in 1951 after 10 years in the majors with a record of 108-82.

Began Minus All-America receiver Mike Williams, USC's defense of its national championship, with a 24-13 win over Virginia Tech last Saturday. Two days earlier the NCAA denied Williams's request to have his college eligibility restored, saying the wideout was academically ineligible and had vio-

lated NCAA rules by signing with an agent. Williams, 20, who would have been a junior this season, planned to enter the NFL draft before a league rule barring players who have been out of high school less than three years from turning pro was upheld by the Supreme Court. The NCAA's decision left Williams without a team—he plans to take classes at USC and, his former agent says, has offers to do national TV broadcasting work. "We've been preparing without him for six months," says quarterback Matt Leinart. "We've moved on."

Lost For 12 hours, the Stanley Cup. The trophy was checked onto an Air Canada flight last week from Vancouver to Fort St. John, B.C., where it was to spend the day with Lightning scout Jake Goertzen. But it never made it onto the plane. "I'm waiting in baggage claim, and it doesn't show up," says Walter Neubrand, who escorts the Cup everywhere it goes. "Basically, I was angry." The 35-pound trophy, which travels in a 65-pound case, was taken out of the luggage hold because the plane was over its restricted weight. (To save money, the Cup doesn't fly coach.) It turned up in the Vancouver airport's luggage area and eventually made it to Goertzen. "I've done this 100 times before. I make sure the ticket agents take a look at it, and ask them to take care of it," Neubrand says. "We're at the mercy of the airlines. All we can do is hope it doesn't happen again."



Won By the United States, the medals race in Athens, with 103. That comes to one medal for every 2,854,786 Americans—not bad, but not nearly as impressive as the Bahamas, a nation of 314,000 which got a gold in the 400 meters from Tonique Williams-Darling (*right*) and a bronze in the 200 from Debbie Ferguson. The top five countries in medals per capita:



Country (medals)	People per medal
Bahamas (2)	157,000
Australia (49)	402,673
Cuba (27)	418,519
Estonia (3)	441,000
Slovenia (4)	496,000

China was third in medals with 63, but that's just one for every 20 million people—70th out of the 75 countries that won medals. India was last, at one medal for its 1.065 billion people. But at least India wasn't one of the 127 teams to go home empty-handed. The five biggest to win no medals:

Country	Population
Pakistan	153,578,000
Bangladesh	146,736,000
Vietnam	81,377,000
Philippines	79,999,000
Congo	52,771,000

Isle of Might

Celebrated By the tiny island of Curaçao (pop. 192,000), the first Little League World Series title by a team from the Caribbean. Curaçao cruised to a 5-2 win over U.S. champ Thousand Oaks, Calif., in South Williamsport, Pa., on Sunday behind an 11-strikeout performance by Carlos (Big Papi) Pineda and a two-run homer by Jurickson Profar. The victory sparked fireworks and a celebration in the capital city of Willemstad, where fans watched on outdoor big-screen televisions. Said coach Luis Provacia, "Winning the series will be like celebrating the Fourth of July in America." The excitement spread to the Atlanta Braves' clubhouse, where outfielder and Curaçao native Andruw Jones intently followed the kids on TV.

BIG KIDS Pineda's arm and Profar's homer (bottom) had the U.S. climbing the walls.

Occupying just 182 square miles off the coast of Venezuela, Curaçao has sent a team to Williamsport each of the last four years. The previous three squads lost to Japan in the international final, but this year's team proved to be a self-assured and resilient bunch. (On the eve of the final a Williamsport newspaper asked five members to name the tournament's best player. Four nominated themselves.) Curaçao

trailing Taiwan by four runs with four outs to go in its international semifinal before rallying for a 9-8 win, then breezed to a 4-0 win over Mexico to reach the final.

The 13-year-old Pineda, the largest player in the tournament at 5' 11" and 169 pounds, didn't allow a run to Thousand Oaks until the final inning, when he surrendered a two-run homer. Jonathan Schoop, who had the game-winning hit against Taiwan, came on to get the final out with two runners on, then was mobbed by his teammates. Said a beaming Andruw Jones, who happily collected on a bet with teammate and California native Robert Fick, "It means a lot for a little island."



THE WEEK AHEAD

WHAT TO WATCH AND WATCH FOR BY JULIA MORRILL

FRIDAY

3

HOCKEY WORLD CUP, U.S. VS. SLOVAKIA ESPN2 7 PM > Slovakia arrives in St. Paul with a team boasting five players who have at least one 30-goal NHL season. • **THE TONIGHT SHOW WITH JAY LENO NBC 11:35 PM** > Bernie Mac stops by to talk about his baseball movie, *Mr. 3000*.



SATURDAY

4



DERBY DREAMS SPEED CHANNEL 8 PM > Think *Spellbound* on wheels. The film, narrated by NASCAR driver Kasey Kahne, follows seven kids as they build Soap Box Derby cars. • **LAMON BREWSTER (30-2) VS. KALI MEEHAN (29-1) SHOWTIME 10 PM** > Brewster puts his WBO heavyweight title on the line.

SUNDAY

5

CUBS AT MARLINS WGN 3 PM > Florida topped Chicago in last year's NLCS, but in Miami the Marlins won't be able to rely on Steve Bartman. • **HEAD TO HEAD WITH JAMES BROWN FOX SPORTS NET 9 PM** > Brett Favre talks about his late father, and Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher demonstrates his workout.



MONDAY

6

NO. 5 FLORIDA STATE AT NO. 6 MIAMI ABC 8 PM > The Seminoles welcome their in-state rivals—whom they haven't beaten since 1999—to the ACC. Florida State senior QB Chris Rix (3,107 yards in 2003) threw two costly interceptions in last year's game. • **NHRA DRAG RACING U.S. NATIONALS ESPN2 7 PM** > At Indianapolis Raceway Park, a Labor Day tradition celebrates its 50th anniversary.

TUESDAY

7

IN STORES: ESPN25: 25 MIND-BENDING, EYE-POPPING, CULTURE-MORPHING YEARS OF HIGHLIGHTS > Great moments from the network's first 25 years plus Charles Hirschberg's essay on the evolution of the highlight clip. Best reason to buy? It comes with a DVD of *SportsCenter* commercials.



WEDNESDAY

8

ON THIS DAY > In 1914 Boston's "miracle" Braves—who had been in the NL cellar on July 15, 11½ games back—moved into first place. They went on to win the World Series. • **RED SOX AT ATHLETICS 10 PM** > Ninety years later a Boston nine takes on the team it knocked out in a thrilling five-game ALDS last year.



THURSDAY

9

COLTS AT PATRIOTS ABC 9 PM > The defending Super Bowl champs are riding a 15-game winning streak. The pregame show, which starts at 8, features Jessica Simpson, Mary J. Blige, Lenny Kravitz and Elton John. Don't expect any wardrobe malfunctions from Jessica—her performance will be shown on tape.



► **EVERYBODY** who lives in Liberty City knows the best ticket out of the rough, poor Miami neighborhood is a football scholarship, and Miami Northwestern High School has produced 19 NFL players. In 2001 all eyes were on senior linebacker Taurean Charles, including those of filmmaker Todd Lubin, whose *Year of the Bull* (Showtime, Sept. 7) follows the All-America for the season, interviewing the 6' 3", 230-pound Charles and his widowed mother, twin sister, teachers, coaches, college scouts and community boosters. By day Charles struggles to raise his SAT scores to the NCAA-required 820. By night he is a star; one newscaster refers to the 17-year-old team captain as "Taurean Charles: the man, the myth." Rarely have the tensions and pressures endured by young athletes been as effectively conveyed as they are here, and while the film ends with Charles's enrolling at Florida, there's an unfortunate postscript: He's currently suspended from the team after twice being arrested for battery.

—Nancy Ramsey

► **JUST** as in real life, what happens in Vegas will not actually stay in Vegas. Emboldened by the popularity of its World Series of Poker broadcasts and last year's pro football drama, *Playmakers*, ESPN is anteing up for another scripted series, this one set in Sin City. *Tilt*, which will premiere in January and be written by Brian Koppelman and David Levien (who wrote the 1998 poker movie, *Rounders*), delves into the lives of six card sharks. "Given the high stakes, drama and characters who often have unscrupulous backgrounds, poker lends itself to great, gritty storytelling," says ESPN executive vice president Mark Shapiro. And poker players aren't likely to whine that their wholesome image is being corrupted. "All of the elements of Vegas will be present," Shapiro says of *Tilt*. "This will be for mature audiences."

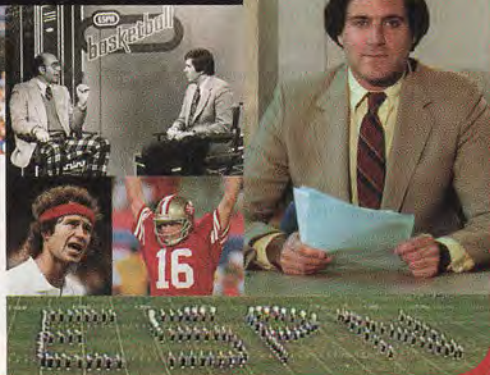
KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM (BERNIE MAC); SCOTT STRAZZANTE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/AP (BARTMAN); ESPN BOOKS AND HYPERION (BOOK); JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES (SIMPSON); NATIONAL BASEBALL LIBRARY (BRAVES); TOM DIPACE PHOTOGRAPHY (RIX); KEN LOVE/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL/AP (SOAPBOX DERBY)

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SPORTS BEAT

THANKS TO the 2002 women's champ, the U.S. Open will have a decidedly retro look. "I thought about what I like to wear, and I like denim, so I started sketching tennis outfits and Nike did the rest," **Serena Williams** told SI. "I thought back to **Andre [Agassi]** and his cute little ripped-jean shorts, and I thought, Why not bring it back?" Williams's wardrobe collection, which will be on sale to the public next spring, includes a pleated denim skirt, a mesh tennis dress and knee-high "rebel" boots, which she plans to wear for warmups. "You always play better when you look good," says Williams (*below*), who is confident that she is fully recovered from the knee injury that kept her out of the Olympics. "I was so sad that I didn't get to wear my Athens outfits. But now I'm focused on bringing my game to the Open with New York style."



■ So how did a man wearing a blue tutu and

a spotted leotard manage to evade security and take a leap off the springboard and into the pool at the Olympic Aquatics Center during the men's synchronized diving competition on Aug. 16? "It was actually pretty easy," struggling Montreal musician and publicity boy **Ron Bensimhon**, 31, told SI. "I guess they were so busy looking for terrorists, they missed the guy in the tutu." Despite reports that he was trying to impress his wife, Bensimhon had a more basic motive: He wanted publicity for his forthcoming debut album. An experienced party crasher—he ambushed **Annika Sorenstam** at the 2003 British Open—Bensimhon was surprised by the harsh reaction his Olympic stunt drew. Greek authorities threatened him with a terrorism charge and five years in prison before slapping him with a fine of 2,500 Euros for trespassing. He also claims that police officers dragged him into a



bathroom and "beat the s---" out of him. "The officers were yelling at me in Greek," Bensimhon says. "I didn't understand what they were saying, but they were clearly pissed."

■ Perhaps it's because she spends so much time rolling around in the sand in a skimpy bathing suit. A nationwide survey by love.com found that the female Olympian Americans would most like to date is beach volleyball gold medalist **Misty May**. But the 27-year-old champ, who took gold with **Kerri Walsh**, is off the market: She's engaged to Florida Marlins prospect **Matt Treanor**. Finishing behind May in the survey were swimmers **Natalie Coughlin** and **Amanda Beard**. The most dateable men were beach volleyballer **Dain Blanton**, tennis star **Andy Roddick** and swimmer **Klete Keller**. . . . Net surfers aren't the only people who think Roddick is cute. The Australian women's water polo team put a bounty on his

lips: \$500 to the first girl to kiss him. When he heard about it, Roddick said, "I'm thinking it's going to be a hit-and-run attack while I am standing in line for food or something. I find



PICTURE THIS

You gotta love human beings: they're resilient, they're courageous—and they're stackable. Especially in the Spanish village of Villafraña del Penedes, near Barcelona, where on Monday, at an annual festival, men (and women) conspired to build castles, called *castells*, in the air. The preening towers, constructed of more than 100 people, are a centuries-old Catalan tradition.

THIS WEEK'S SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Gambling websites are taking bets on whether Kobe Bryant will be convicted of sexual assault (1 to 2) and divorced (2 to 1) by the end of 2004.

it pretty funny, but I'm gonna be like the basketball men, you know. I'm holding out for more money." Roddick successfully avoided being bussed; no one won the dough.

« THEY SAID IT BERNARD HOPKINS

Boxer who will make \$10 million for a Sept. 18 fight with Oscar De La Hoya, on why he shops at Sam's Club: "You have to bag it, but it's worth the savings."

IMPORTANT SAFETY AND DOSING INFORMATION

LEVITRA is a prescription medicine that is used to treat erectile dysfunction (ED). Men taking nitrate drugs, often used to control chest pain (also known as angina), should not take LEVITRA. Men who use alpha blockers, sometimes prescribed for high blood pressure or prostate problems, also should not take LEVITRA. Such combinations could cause blood pressure to drop to an unsafe level. You should not take LEVITRA if your doctor determines that sexual activity poses a health risk for you. Men who experience an erection for more than four hours should seek immediate medical attention. LEVITRA does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases. The starting dose of LEVITRA is 10 mg taken no more than once per day. Your doctor will decide the dose that is right for you. In patients taking certain medications such as ritonavir, indinavir, ketoconazole, itraconazole, and erythromycin, lower doses of LEVITRA are recommended, and time between doses of LEVITRA may need to be extended. In clinical trials, the most commonly reported side effects were headache, flushing, and stuffy or runny nose. LEVITRA is available in 2.5-mg, 5-mg, 10-mg, and 20-mg tablets.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT PATIENT INFORMATION.



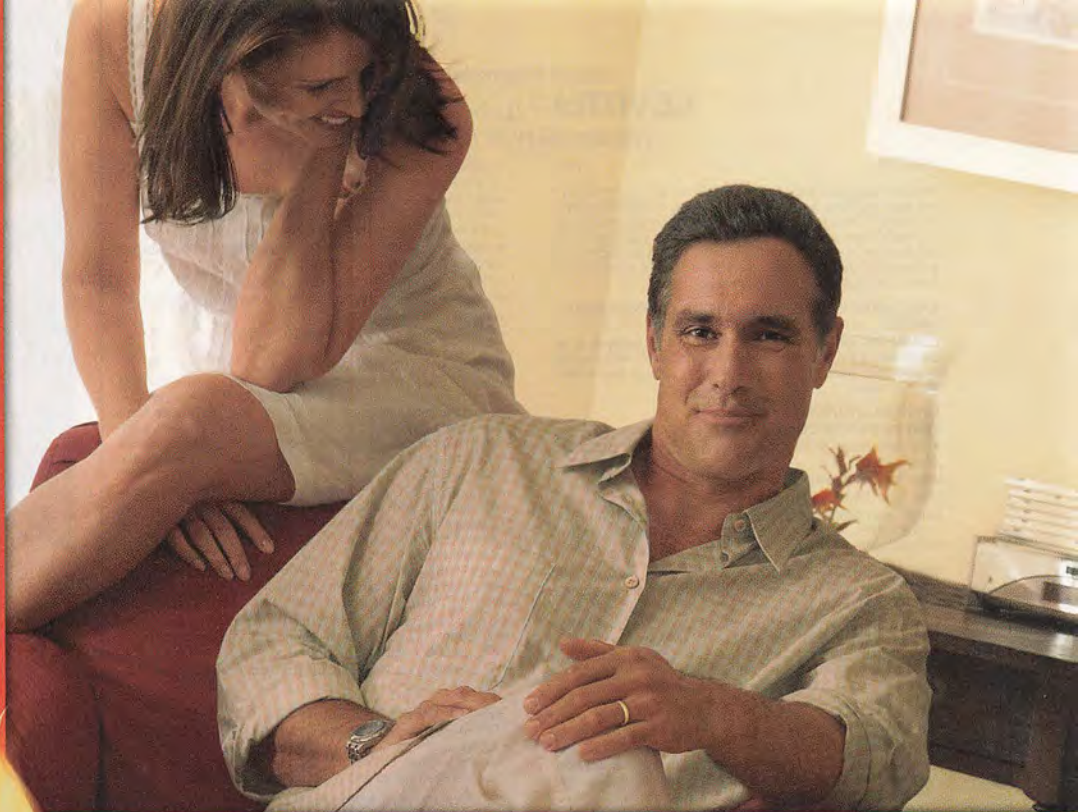
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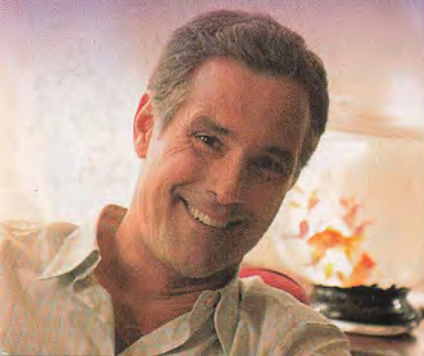
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Patient Information
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08669034IP

8/03

Read the Patient Information about LEVITRA before you start taking it and again each time you get a refill. There may be new information. You may also find it helpful to share this information with your partner. This leaflet does not take the place of talking with your doctor. You and your doctor should talk about LEVITRA when you start taking it and at regular checkups. If you do not understand the information, or have questions, talk with your doctor or pharmacist.

WHAT IMPORTANT INFORMATION SHOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT LEVITRA?

LEVITRA can cause your blood pressure to drop suddenly to an unsafe level if it is taken with certain other medicines. With a sudden drop in blood pressure, you could get dizzy, faint, or have a heart attack or stroke.

Do not take LEVITRA if you:

- take any medicines called "nitrates."
- use recreational drugs called "poppers" like amyl nitrate and butyl nitrate.
- take medicines called alpha-blockers.

(See "Who Should Not Take LEVITRA?")

Tell all your healthcare providers that you take LEVITRA. If you need emergency medical care for a heart problem, it will be important for your healthcare provider to know when you last took LEVITRA.

WHAT IS LEVITRA?

LEVITRA is a prescription medicine taken by mouth for the treatment of erectile dysfunction (ED) in men.

ED is a condition where the penis does not harden and expand when a man is sexually excited, or when he cannot keep an erection. A man who has trouble getting or keeping an erection should see his doctor for help if the condition bothers him. LEVITRA may help a man with ED get and keep an erection when he is sexually excited.

LEVITRA does not:

- cure ED
- increase a man's sexual desire
- protect a man or his partner from sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Speak to your doctor about ways to guard against sexually transmitted diseases.
- serve as a male form of birth control

LEVITRA is only for men with ED. LEVITRA is not for women or children. LEVITRA must be used only under a doctor's care.

HOW DOES LEVITRA WORK?

When a man is sexually stimulated, his body's normal physical response is to increase blood flow to his penis. This results in an erection. LEVITRA helps increase blood flow to the penis and may help men with ED get and keep an erection satisfactory for sexual activity. Once a man has completed sexual activity, blood flow to his penis decreases, and his erection goes away.

WHO CAN TAKE LEVITRA?

Talk to your doctor to decide if LEVITRA is right for you.

LEVITRA has been shown to be effective in men over the age of 18 years who have erectile dysfunction, including men with diabetes or who have undergone prostatectomy.

WHO SHOULD NOT TAKE LEVITRA?

Do not take LEVITRA if you:

- take any medicines called "nitrates" (See "What important information should you know about LEVITRA?"). Nitrates are commonly used to treat angina. Angina is a symptom of heart disease and can cause pain in your chest, jaw, or down your arm. Medicines called nitrates include nitroglycerin that is found in tablets, sprays, ointments, pastes, or patches. Nitrates can also be found in other medicines such as isosorbide dinitrate or isosorbide mononitrate. Some recreational drugs called "poppers" also contain nitrates, such as amyl nitrate and butyl nitrate. Do not use LEVITRA if you are using these drugs. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure if any of your medicines are nitrates.
- take medicines called "alpha-blockers." Alpha-blockers are sometimes prescribed for prostate problems or high blood pressure. If LEVITRA is taken with alpha-blockers, your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe level. You could get dizzy and faint.
- you have been told by your healthcare provider to not have sexual activity because of health problems. Sexual activity can put an extra strain on your heart, especially if your heart is already weak from a heart attack or heart disease.
- are allergic to LEVITRA or any of its ingredients. The active ingredient in LEVITRA is called vardenafil. See the end of this leaflet for a complete list of ingredients.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DISCUSS WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE TAKING LEVITRA?

Before taking LEVITRA, tell your doctor about all your medical problems, including if you:

- have heart problems such as angina, heart failure, irregular heartbeats, or have had a heart attack. Ask your doctor if it is safe for you to have sexual activity.
- have low blood pressure or have high blood pressure that is not controlled
- have had a stroke
- or any family members have a rare heart condition known as prolongation of the QT interval (long QT syndrome)
- have liver problems
- have kidney problems and require dialysis
- have retinitis pigmentosa, a rare genetic (runs in families) eye disease
- have stomach ulcers
- have a bleeding problem
- have a deformed penis shape or Peyronie's disease
- have had an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- have blood cell problems such as sickle cell anemia, multiple myeloma, or leukemia

CAN OTHER MEDICATIONS AFFECT LEVITRA?

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. LEVITRA and other medicines may affect each other. Always check with your doctor before starting or stopping any medicines. Especially tell your doctor if you take any of the following:

- medicines called nitrates (See "What important information should you know about LEVITRA?")
- medicines called alpha-blockers. These include Hytrin® (terazosin HCl), Flomax® (tamsulosin HCl), Cardura® (doxazosin mesylate), Minipress® (prazosin HCl) or Uroxatral® (alfuzosin HCl).
- medicines that treat abnormal heartbeat. These include quinidine, procainamide, amiodarone and sotalol.
- ritonavir (Norvir®) or indinavir sulfate (Crixivan®)
- ketoconazole or itraconazole (such as Nizoral® or Sporanox®)
- erythromycin
- other medicines or treatments for ED

HOW SHOULD YOU TAKE LEVITRA?

Take LEVITRA exactly as your doctor prescribes. LEVITRA comes in different doses (2.5 mg, 5 mg, 10 mg, and 20 mg). For most men, the recommended starting dose is 10 mg. **Take LEVITRA no more than once a day.** Doses should be taken at least 24 hours apart. Some men can only take a low dose of LEVITRA because of medical conditions or medicines they take. Your doctor will prescribe the dose that is right for you.

- If you are older than 65 or have liver problems, your doctor may start you on a lower dose of LEVITRA.
- If you are taking certain other medicines your doctor may prescribe a lower starting dose and limit you to one dose of LEVITRA in a 72-hour (3 days) period.

Take 1 LEVITRA tablet about 1 hour (60 minutes) before sexual activity. Some form of sexual stimulation is needed for an erection to happen with LEVITRA. LEVITRA may be taken with or without meals.

Do not change your dose of LEVITRA without talking to your doctor. Your doctor may lower your dose or raise your dose, depending on how your body reacts to LEVITRA.

If you take too much LEVITRA, call your doctor or emergency room right away.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LEVITRA?

The most common side effects with LEVITRA are headache, flushing, stuffy or runny nose, indigestion, upset stomach, or dizziness. These side effects usually go away after a few hours. Call your doctor if you get a side effect that bothers you or one that will not go away.

LEVITRA may uncommonly cause:

- an erection that won't go away (priapism). If you get an erection that lasts more than 4 hours, get medical help right away. Priapism must be treated as soon as possible or lasting damage can happen to your penis including the inability to have erections.
- vision changes, such as seeing a blue tinge to objects or having difficulty telling the difference between the colors blue and green.

These are not all the side effects of LEVITRA. For more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

HOW SHOULD LEVITRA BE STORED?

- Store LEVITRA at room temperature between 59° and 86° F (15° to 30° C).
- Keep LEVITRA and all medicines out of the reach of children.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT LEVITRA.

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for conditions other than those described in patient information leaflets. Do not use LEVITRA for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give LEVITRA to other people, even if they have the same symptoms that you have. It may harm them.

This leaflet summarizes the most important information about LEVITRA. If you would like more information, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about LEVITRA that is written for health professionals.

For more information you can also visit www.LEVITRA.com, or call 1-866-LEVITRA.

WHAT ARE THE INGREDIENTS OF LEVITRA?

Active Ingredient: vardenafil hydrochloride

Inactive Ingredients: microcrystalline cellulose, croscopolone, colloidal silicon dioxide, magnesium stearate, hypromellose, polyethylene glycol, titanium dioxide, yellow ferric oxide, and red ferric oxide.

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TOM VERDUCCI'S **MAILBAG**



The Braves have apparently won the NL East again, but can they do any damage in the playoffs?

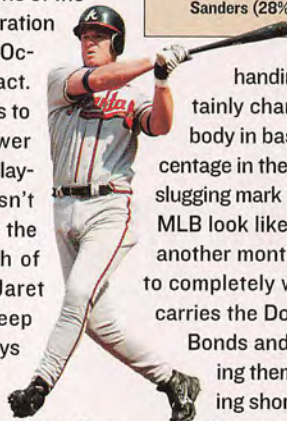
Lee Clontz, Atlanta

VERDUCCI: Atlanta is a dangerous team now that Rafael Furcal is getting on base and Chipper Jones (below) has regained his power stroke. But whether they advance through October is all about their starting pitching. Just ask John Smoltz. He dominated games and was one of the best clutch pitchers of his generation as a starter. But as a closer in October he has had minimal impact. Why? He needs starting pitchers to get the game to him. I like power and pure stuff on the mound in playoff baseball, and Atlanta doesn't have that kind of staff. I do like the Braves' bullpen and the depth of their lineup, though. So if Jaret Wright and Russ Ortiz can keep games close, Atlanta will find ways to win late.

Can any baseball writers justify not casting their MVP vote for Barry Bonds?

Robert Hamm, Naples, Fla.

VERDUCCI: Can we at least wait until we play the September schedule before we start



handing out hardware? Bonds certainly changes games more than anybody in baseball. With an on-base percentage in the neighborhood of .600 and a slugging mark north of .800, the guy makes MLB look like PS2. But, see, there is still another month to play. And I'm not ready to completely write off Adrian Beltre if he carries the Dodgers into the playoffs and Bonds and the Giants wind up watching them on TV. And I'm still not selling short the great seasons by Scott Rolen and Albert Pujols in St. Louis. Is Bonds the favorite? Absolutely. But let's see what September brings.

For more from Verducci, go to si.com/baseball.

THE POLL POSITION

Which sport would you like to see eliminated from the Olympics?

- ☐ Dressage
- ☐ Race walking
- ☐ Rhythmic gymnastics
- ☐ Synchronized swimming
- ☐ Trampoline
- ☐ None of the above

Vote at si.com/more.
Watch for the results here next week.

Results of last week's poll: We asked whom you would most like to see make a comeback. After more than 38,000 votes, here are the results: Smarty Jones (37%); Ricky Williams (29%); Deion Sanders (28%); Riddick Bowe (6%).

TRUTH + **RUMORS**

Embattled Phillies manager **Larry Bowa** will keep his job until at least the end of the season, according to general manager **Ed Wade**.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (8/29)

Heat president **Pat Riley** would like to extend **Shaquille O'Neal's** contract, which has two years left but an opt-out after next season. Riley hasn't spoken with free agent **Karl Malone** but said the team "would love to talk to him and sign him."

The Miami Herald (8/29)

Cleveland is still dangling **James Jackson** in front of the Dolphins, but Browns coach **Butch Davis** said he wants a third-round pick for

Jackson. Another source said the Browns would likely take less.

The Miami Herald (8/29)

Buccaneers general manager **Bruce Allen** vehemently denied he has turned down trade offers for holdout receiver **Keenan McCardell** (above), who claimed the team had an offer of a mid-round pick for him. Allen said no team has called.

St. Petersburg Times (8/29)

To read more, go to si.com/scorecard.





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Scorecard

Faces in the Crowd

Kurt Pessa, LUBBOCK, TEXAS

Baseball

Pessa, a May graduate of Coronado High, led the Mustangs to the District 2-5A title. The righthanded pitcher and third baseman had a 10-2 record with a 1.66 ERA and batted .454 with a team-high 17 RBIs. He also helped the tennis team win its first state title.



Zee Zee Young, ANCHORAGE

Track and Field-Basketball

Young, a May graduate of Dimond High, was named Alaska's female high school athlete of the year. She is the state 4-A 300-yard hurdles champion. As a point guard on the basketball team, she led the Lady Lynx to their first state championship in 25 years.

Jeffrey Holguin, YORBA LINDA, CALIF.

Shooting

Holguin, 25, a junior at CU-Colorado Springs, won the double trap event at the USA Shooting National Championships in Colorado Springs. A member of the U.S. National team, he also won the bronze medal at the ISSF World Cup in Americana, Brazil.



Darcy Wood, GREENWOOD, IND.

Softball

Wood, a May graduate of Center Grove High, was named Miss Softball Indiana and the state's Gatorade softball player of the year. She finished the season with a 25-2 record, 19 shutouts, a 0.21 ERA and a state-record 443 strikeouts in 200% innings.

Tim Wunderlich, MANCHESTER, MD.

Track and Field

Tim, a senior at North Carroll High, won the young men's (17-18) decathlon at the U.S. Track & Field Junior Olympics in Eugene, Ore. This spring he won the state Class 3A pole vault title and was named Carroll County performer of the year.



Roxanne Sparks, HOQUIAM, WASH.

Karate

Roxanne, a third-grader at St. Mary Regional School, won three gold medals in her division (seven year olds) at the AAU Junior Olympics. She became the first Washingtonian to win a Junior Olympic gold and World Karate Federation title in the same year.

Shawn Warren, WINDHAM, MAINE

Golf

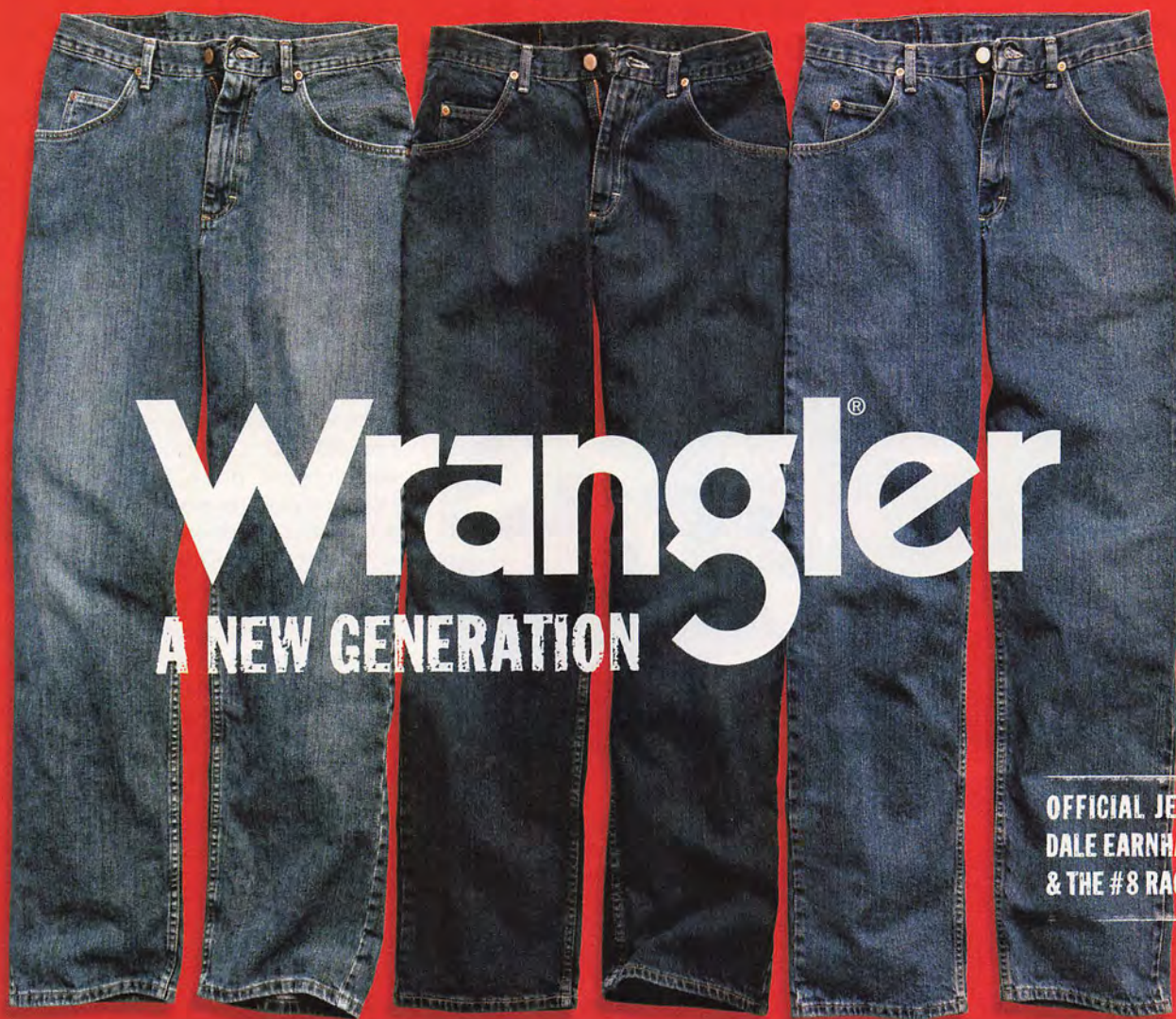
Warren, a sophomore at Marshall, where he is a member of the Thundering Herd team, won a playoff at Riverside Golf Course in Portland and became the first amateur in 33 years to win the Maine Open Golf Championship. He also won two state junior titles.



SI.com To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces.



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Football, Sony Style

IT USED TO BE that the only way fans could feed the football fix was by pressing an ear to a gravelly radio broadcast, flipping through a sports page or, for a fortunate few, heading to the stadium to see a game live. Times have changed, of course. But it's not just TV, with cable and satellite letting you watch just about any game you could ever want to see. It's not just the Internet, with its constant barrage of stats and analysis. It goes beyond that now—thanks to the Sony VAIO A-Series notebook. These sleek, elegant computers have been designed to entertain; built for pleasure, not just business. Blending all media a true fan cherishes, VAIO will let you become the envy of Planet Pigskin.

Sony's VAIO® A-Series notebook offers an experience like no other for football fans

Win With WiFi

Football is by far the most popular fantasy sport, with millions of player/fans crunching numbers and info to get the upper hand on their friends. Fantasy advice: Always draft a QB early. Be cautious about drafting rookies too high. And get a VAIO. Want to make a trade offer over e-mail? Need an injury report? You won't miss a thing thanks to the VAIO A-Series' integrated wireless internet connection¹. Don't wait for it. WiFi it.

Picture Perfect

The A-Series' optional AV Entertainment Dock hooks you into sight, sound and motion for every fall weekend. Plug in to Sony's powerful TV tuner, grab a cold one and kick back. Use the personal video recorder to save any action you have to miss, then watch it on your own time. And you'll see it all—every spin of that tight spiral, every pleat on that cheerleader's skirt—on a wide screen (available on certain models) in the HD-inspired quality of Sony's vivid, high-contrast XBRITE™ LCD technology. The entertainment dock also includes a high-end digital audio amplifier, so pop in a CD of your school's marching band and crank the fight song for kickoff.

Home Games

Not every touchdown you care about comes from your favorite team or the backs and receivers on your fantasy roster. You root for your son's Pop Warner team too, and the VAIO A-Series notebook can enhance that experience too.

Record his games on a digital video camera then burn his personal highlight DVD using the integrated DVD±RW drive². Movie making is a breeze with Sony's Click to DVD™ software, and you can save up to 4.8 GB of recorded home movies and other digital content.

Lookin' Good

Football fans don't have to look like that slob at the game with a dog bone in his mouth and his bare beer belly painted orange. Lithe, fast and packing a lot of power—like a game-breaking wideout—the VAIO A-Series notebook is easy on the go and easy on the eyes. For more information, visit www.sony.com/vaio.

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1 Requires 802.11b or 802.11g compatible access point. Some functionality may require Internet services which may require a fee.
2 DVD Media/Formats are not universally compatible.

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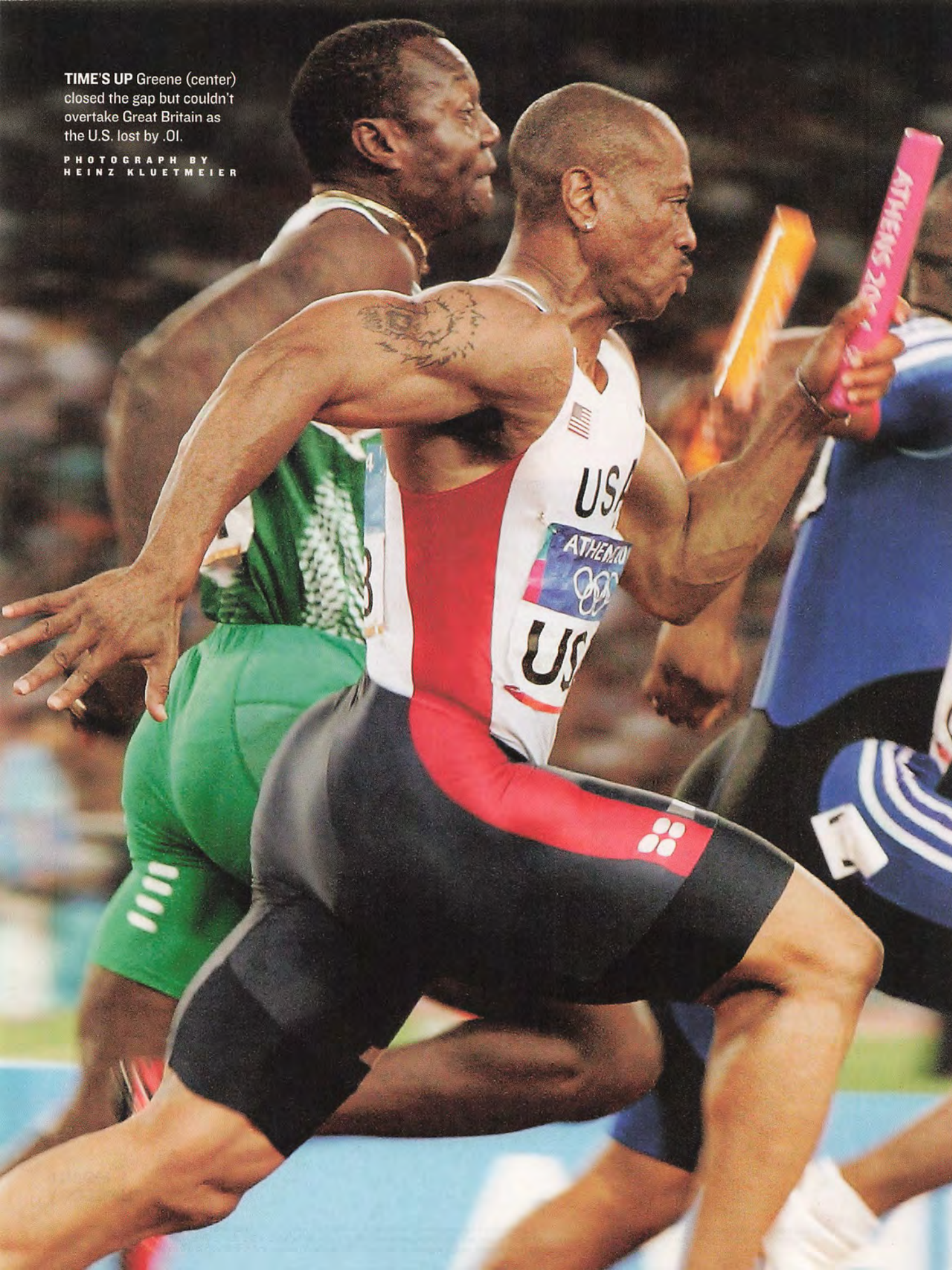


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TIME'S UP Greene (center) closed the gap but couldn't overtake Great Britain as the U.S. lost by .01.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
HEINZ KLUETMEIER





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2004 Olympics

STICKS AND GROANS

The vaunted 4 x 100 relay teams both came up short for the first time in Olympic history, but the U.S. still reached the top of the medal heap

BY TIM LAYDEN

JUST BEFORE midnight last Friday on the floor of the Athens Olympic Stadium, U.S. pole vaulter Toby Stevenson looked up between jumps and saw a fleet of runners tear past him on the final leg of the women's 4×100-meter relay, the crowd in full throat. The U.S. team was missing, and Stevenson was briefly confused. *Aren't we in this race? What happened?* The blur passed, and Stevenson saw U.S. sprinters Marion Jones and Lauryn Williams standing together behind the pack, disconsolate after missing their baton exchange. "What are the odds?" Stevenson would say much later, after he had won silver



behind teammate Tim Mack's gold. "This sport is so unforgiving."

The lessons from Athens were these: Olympic track and field reserves no medals for past champions (like Jones), honors no favorites for simply showing up (like the U.S. men's and women's 4×100 relay teams), but it does offer second chances to those who have failed and find the passion to try again (like the brilliant Hicham El Guerrouj of Morocco). It permits renewal and celebration (like the United States' 24 medals, four more than it earned in Sydney), but also provides daily reminders that the drug-bust frenzy of the past year is not over. (Three track gold medalists were stripped, more than in all previous Games combined.)

When all was said and done in the final week of the Games, the U.S. men had won eight of the nine medals in the 100, 200 and 400 meters; Dwight Phillips had held off U.S. teammate John Moffitt for a one-two in the long jump; and in the dying sunlight on Sunday, Mebrahtom Keflezighi of the U.S. took silver in the marathon, running the race of his life.

A 29-year-old born in war-torn Eritrea and a graduate of UCLA, Keflezighi became a U.S. citizen in 1998. He won the United States' first men's marathon medal since Frank Shorter's silver in 1976; Keflezighi's silver, combined with Deena Kastor's bronze, marked the first time the U.S. has won a men's and a women's marathon medal in the same Games.

Two nights earlier Mack and Stevenson had staged a riveting duel that closed the evening's show. "I looked around at one point and thought, Hey, we're the only thing going on," said Mack. Beneath the towering Olympic cauldron, Mack cleared an Olympic record 19' 6½" on his third and final attempt and watched as Stevenson barely missed at that same height. A modest, 31-year-old journeyman whose only international title had come in 2001 at the now-defunct Goodwill Games and whose e-mail address is GOLDNATHENS, Mack took a victory lap—and a half—in celebration.

Jones knows from victory laps. She had been the athletic and corporate heroine of the Sydney Games, winning five medals. But on Friday her tumultuous Olympiad—in which she has been divorced, given birth to a son, been implicated, though not charged, in the ongoing BALCO steroid case (she has denied using banned substances), and, this year, fallen from dominance deep into mediocrity—came to a crashing end.

On a breezy Athens night she finished a dull fifth in the long jump, each of her last three legal jumps landing shorter than the previous one after she had leapt 22' 5¼" on her second attempt. The 4×100 relay seemed certain to produce a medal, salvaging something for Jones's efforts, even though her inclusion on the team was controversial for three reasons: first was the possibility that she could receive a drug ban, imperiling any relay medals; second, the finals in the long jump and the 4×100 relay were on the same night; and third, 200-meter silver medalist Allyson Felix, 18, had been running faster than Jones.

In the Athens final Jones ran the second leg and was to pass to Williams, the 20-year-old 100-meter silver medalist. However, deep in the 20-meter passing zone, Jones desperately extended the baton toward Williams, who flailed at the air but didn't get the stick until too late. The handoff might have been botched because Williams did not wait for Jones, but the more significant factor was that Jones was staggering into the zone exhausted—"I was out of breath," she said

after the race—and running slower than in the previous night's semifinals, when there had been no long jump to sap her energy.

The U.S. men's 4×100 team seemed an even bigger lock than the women's. Three of the top four finishers in the Athens 100 meters—Gatlin, bronze medalist Maurice Greene and fourth-place finisher Shawn Crawford, all of whom broke 9.90—were on the squad. Crawford, who once raced a giraffe and a zebra on television (beat the giraffe, lost to the zebra), had won the 200-meter gold on a surreal Thursday night, when the start of his race was delayed four minutes by Greek fans chanting the name of Konstantinos Kenteris, the 2000 Olympic champion and national hero who withdrew from the Games after missing a drug test, and *Hel-las! Hel-las!* (literally, *Greece in Greek*). The fans also booed whenever U.S. sprinters were shown on the big screen in the stadium. "I stayed cool," Crawford said a day later. "I was just saying to myself, Please start this race."

Crawford led off the relay on Saturday and completed a mediocre pass to Gatlin, whose pass to Coby Miller was so bad that Miller nearly had to stop. He restarted and passed to Greene, who missed catching Great Britain by only .01 of a second. It was the first time in the Games (excluding those held in Moscow, which the U.S. boycotted) that the U.S. won neither of the 4×100 relays.

El Guerrouj would understand their failure. At 29 he came to Athens as the world-record holder in the mile and 1,500 meters, yet he had fallen short in the latter at the 1996 and 2000 Olympics. He outkicked Bernard Lagat to win the 1,500 here on Aug. 24 and on Saturday night sat patiently as the 10,000-meter gold medalist—and 5,000 world-record holder—Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia set a sluggish pace in the 5K. "[Bekele] must have thought he could outkick the greatest miler in history," said Rich Kenah of the U.S., a former world championship bronze medalist in the 800 meters who was at the stadium.

That was a miscalculation. "I said to myself, Hicham, for people to look at you as a legend, you have to win this race," El Guerrouj would say later, and he easily floated past Bekele in the final 50 meters to become the first 1,500–5,000 double gold medalist since Pavo Nurmi in 1924. El Guerrouj wrapped himself in a Moroccan flag and high-stepped down the home-stretch in celebration, his second chances seized, his legend secure. □



RARE AIR Mack vaulted to record height to take gold.

JOHN BEVER

QUICK WORK The hand speed of Ward (red) was decisive in the final.



Hitting While We're Down

U.S. boxing is bruised, but Andre Ward punched a golden ticket

WELL, AT LEAST there's Andre Ward. If not for the 20-year-old light heavyweight, who alone among his supposedly talented teammates won a gold medal on Sunday, the U.S. might have been sufficiently embarrassed to just drop the sport. As it is, Ward's medal, along with a bronze for middleweight Andre Dirrell, amount to the most showing by a U.S. team since 1948 and extends a steady decline in its Olympic performance.

But as we said, at least there's Ward, who was the opposite of his underachieving brethren. Matched with bigger and more experienced fighters every bout, he was somehow able to gather inspiration. In his biggest fight earlier in the week, he reread the story of David and Goliath to motivate himself against the Russian world champion, Evgeny Makarenko, and beat him 23-16. Then, in his gold medal bout on Sunday, he imagined his father, Frank, dead two years now, watching him from the stands. A 20-13 victory over Belarus's 26-year-old Magomed Aripadjev followed.

Except for Dirrell, whose Olympic run was halted last Friday, the other U.S. boxers were not so easy to galvanize. Although there were the usual complaints about scoring, it was plain that the U.S. team, as usual, was simply not experienced, smart or even dedicated enough. When super heavyweight Jason Estrada bombed out in his medal match against a guy he'd beaten in another competition, he just shrugged it off and said, "If I'm gonna lose, I'm gonna lose getting hit as little as possible." That's the spirit.

The U.S. hasn't had a truly good non-boycotted Olympics since 1976—Sugar Ray Leonard et al.—and declining medal counts (there were four in Sydney, and that seemed disgraceful at the time) do not inspire hope. But this is a big country, and it's hard to believe there aren't at least a couple more Andre Wards out there.

—Richard Hoffer

photograph by Al Tielemans

Winners and Losers

► While the U.S. performed largely as expected, winning a Games-high 103 medals (six more than in Sydney), several other countries surprisingly fared well or faltered.

► THE WINNERS

China With 32 gold and 63 total medals, the 2008 host established itself as a power player for the Beijing Games (page 52).

Japan Its 37 medals—10 in judo and eight in swimming—more than doubled its 2000 haul.

Israel Windsurfer Gal Fridman (*inset*) won the country's first-ever gold.

Greece Apart from hosting a better Games than anyone could have predicted, it won 16 medals—most since the 1896 Games.

► THE LOSERS

Canada Its 12 medals were its fewest since 1988.

Serbia & Montenegro Its touted men's basketball and volleyball teams failed to reach the podium.

Nigeria Africa's most populous nation won two medals, its worst showing since 1988.

Greece It was shamed by drug scandals involving star sprinters Konstantinos Kenteris and Ekaterini Thanou and weightlifter Leonidas Sampanis, who was stripped of his bronze medal. —Brian Cazeneuve



Dope Sheet

There were two surprises about the record number of athletes—24, compared with the previous high of 12, at the 1984 Los Angeles Games—forced out of the Olympics by drug tests: Half were women (including weightlifter **Sanamacha Chanu**



of India, *inset*), and many were caught using substances popular 20 years ago. "Some of the less-sophisticated athletes and coaches must have decided we're so focused on the hot new drugs that they don't believe we're still testing for [older ones]," said one doping expert working the Games.

—Don Yaeger

DAWN OF AN ERA

Saving her best for last, Dawn Staley showed the U.S. women, on and off the court, the way to a third straight gold

BY KELLI ANDERSON

MAKE NO mistake, Dawn Staley was thrilled when she was selected, on Aug. 12, to be the first basketball player to carry the American flag in the opening ceremonies. But in the ensuing days, she never forgot that her main purpose in Athens was to pass a torch. ¶ When the 5' 6" 34-year-old with aching knees and multiple job titles—Temple coach, Charlotte Sting point guard, MBA candidate, among others—was named to the U.S. national team two years ago, “People said, ‘Why her? She’s beyond her prime,’ ”

Staley recalled during the team’s romp through pool play in Athens. “The reason I’m here is to help the U.S. win its third straight gold medal and to teach the younger players how to do it again.”

Staley accomplished both goals last Saturday as the U.S. beat Australia 74–63 in a rematch of the gold medal game in Sydney four years ago. Urging her teammates to shake off a sloppy first half, Staley scored 14 points in the final 20 minutes. “Dawn is a great leader,” said 5' 7" backup point guard Shannon Johnson, who also was a second-half spark plug with 12 points. “You saw that tonight. She put us on her back and gave us a big lift.”

DRIVING FORCE The inspirational Staley shot 4 for 5 in the final.



Much was made of the heat on the U.S. men’s basketball team to win a gold medal, but the pressure on the women’s team was hardly less intense. On the line

besides another gold and a 43-game international winning streak was, in Staley’s opinion, the reputation of the WNBA, one of the two pro leagues that launched in the wake of the ’96 team’s gold medal. (The other, the ABL, lasted 2½ seasons.) Though the teams of other nations featured current or former WNBA players—Australia, for example, had six—Staley, noting that the U.S. team was composed entirely of players from the

LA-Z-GIRL Staley is the recliner among bemedaled teammates (top, from left) Yolanda Griffith, Taurasi, Thompson, Swin Cash; (middle) Smith, Bird, Johnson; (bottom) Catchings, Leslie, Swoopes, Ruth Riley.



league, saw credibility in purely American terms. “We don’t need the media exposure of not winning the gold medal,” she said.

Furthermore, the U.S. women had no easy excuses for failure. Unlike the men’s squad, the women’s team included the best players in the country, a remarkably harmonious mix of Olympic veterans such as Staley, center Lisa Leslie and forward Sheryl Swoopes, who all won gold medals in 1996 and 2000; older Olympic



rookies such as the 30-year-old Johnson and 29-year-old forward Tina Thompson; and budding WNBA stars such as guards Sue Bird and Diana Taurasi and forward Tamika Catchings. None gave a thought to passing up a chance to play on what is still considered the largest stage in women's basketball, even if it meant coming off the bench. "Being in the Olympics is the highest honor," said Taurasi, who was experiencing life as a reserve for the first time in her career.

"That's the way we look at it, anyway."

Staley relished her role as this team's leader. Like a hyperenthusiastic camp counselor, she reminded players to keep hydrated, to get rest and to shut out the myriad distractions. On the court she was just as vigilant. If Leslie, her good friend, took too many outside shots, she'd order her back to the post. "She is like that with everyone," said Bird. "She makes everyone around her better."

Like Staley, coach Van Chancellor took

nothing for granted. The folksy coach of the WNBA's Houston Comets ran practices "that were more intense and competitive than most of our games," said Thompson. The day after a 102-72 blowout of Greece in the quarterfinals, Chancellor had his players doing breakdown defensive drills. "Nobody does that this late in [a tournament]," said Chancellor, "but we aren't used to giving up 72 points."

Pressure defense was a key to the U.S.'s winning its first seven games, including

a 66-62 semifinal squeaker over Russia, by an average of 25.6 points. Without primary outside threat Katie Smith, who was sidelined for most of the Games with torn cartilage in her right knee, the U.S. women were as lackluster from the arc (32%) as were their male counterparts. But they had two effective weapons inside—Leslie (15.6 points per game) and Thompson (14.1)—as well as a trio of point guards in Staley, Johnson and Bird who could get them the ball.

"If you shut down Lisa, then you have to shut down Tina Thompson. If you shut down Tina, you have someone else to worry about," said Australia's forward Penny Taylor after the game. "They have great artillery."

The Australians took solace in having cut their margin of defeat against the U.S.

"I think we're going to see **THE GAP CLOSE and more teams out of Europe be competitive," Donovan said.**

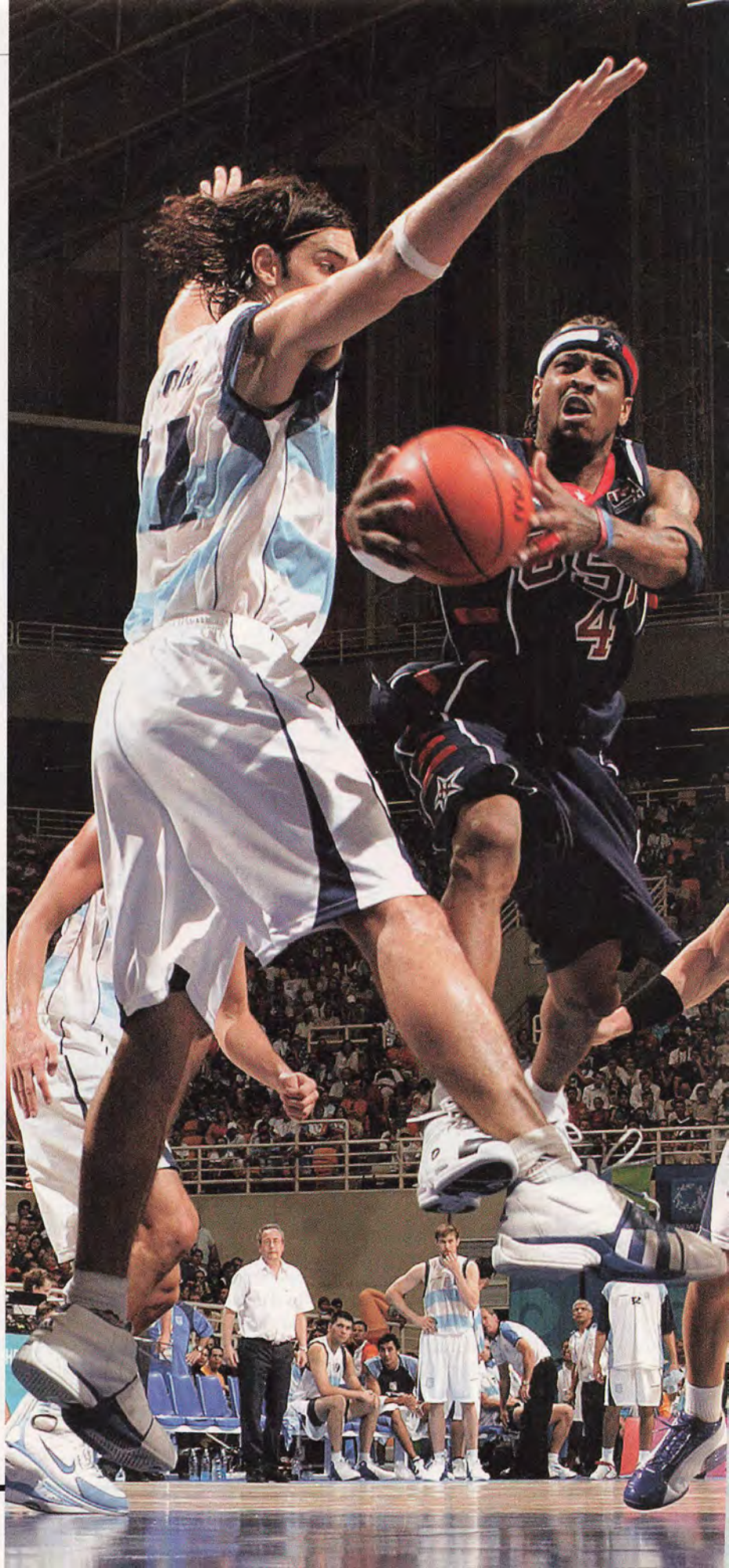
in the last Olympics in half. "You still have to play a perfect game to beat them," said another Australia forward, Trish Fallon, "but we're closing the gap."

Is anybody else? Olympic semifinalists Russia and Brazil are getting better, as is the Czech Republic, according to U.S. assistant coach Anne Donovan. "Most international teams are going bigger, to match our size," Donovan said. "And I see a lot of teams copying the play sets we do. They have recognized that they can't compete with us in the old, slow, half-court European style. As with the men, I think we're going to see the gap close and more teams out of Europe be competitive."

Staley sees little reason for worry. "I can honestly say that after I leave this Olympics, the U.S.A.'s future is going to be left in good hands," she said early last week. But even following the gold medal ceremony she still had a last lesson to impart. As Johnson walked with Staley back to the locker room, the first-time Olympian held out her medal, calling it "my first and only gold."

"Don't say that!" admonished Staley. "I said that in '96."

Smiling, Johnson corrected herself: "For now." □





ALLEN WRENCHED After a semifinal loss to Argentina dashed hopes of gold, Iverson remained upbeat about representing the U.S. in Beijing.

2004 Olympics

THIRD WORLD

There's more to **U.S. men's basketball's** bronze medal finish than a better class of opponents. But will changes be made?

BY JACK MCCALLUM

IT WAS THE Olympics of diminished expectations for the U.S. men's basketball team. So when the Americans won last Saturday night's bronze medal game over Lithuania with a grim and grinding determination, then didn't moon anyone on the podium while Argentina's gold medal samba party went on around them, the final week of the Games could be deemed a qualified success. The U.S. players returned home on Monday with something around their necks, even though for the first time since 1988—and only the third time in 15 Olympics—it wasn't gold. ¶ "I admit it hurts," said forward Shawn Marion, who came off the bench

to score 22 points and lead the U.S. to a 104-96 victory. "But at least we didn't go home empty-handed." Added forward Richard Jefferson, "Let's be honest—we didn't come here to get the bronze. But we can still be proud."

There is little to be said that doesn't include a *but*. And now, after a brief shout-out for Saturday night's effort, it's time for hard questions. Even before the U.S. lost its chance for gold, bowing 89-81 to Argentina in the semis last Friday, NBA commissioner David Stern, the officials and coaches of USA Basketball, and, to a much lesser extent, the players themselves stuck to the party line. To wit: The rest of the basketball-playing world continues to improve; this U.S. team competed hard and honorably; and the criticism that the players engendered was far harsher than

they deserved. In an Olympics replete with drug use and unseemly celebrations by other nations' athletes, many chose to yammer on about guys with cornrows and tattoos lollygagging in the opening ceremonies. They should get a life.

But (there's that word again) the party line went only so far in addressing the root causes of three losses in seven Olympic games—namely, a selection process that emphasizes star quality over team needs; the fragile grasp of fundamentals by many NBA players, including good ones; the diminishing importance that American pros give to representing their country; and the NBA itself, which stands as lord and master over U.S. Olympic hoop hopes while putting in only a part-time effort.

When he wasn't castigating the media for negativity—a soft-shoe act he performs



so assiduously these days that he should speak while sporting a top hat and cane—Stern admitted that the NBA may no longer be “the gold standard” of hoops around the world. Otherwise, the most powerful man in American basketball and the only one with the leverage to effect real change was whistling his happy tune. He insisted that having a 10-member committee (composed almost entirely of NBA personnel gurus) choose the roster works; that the U.S. doesn’t need a standing national team coach; and that this Olympic squad, which numerous All-Stars chose not to join, was formidable. “We’re loaded!” Stern said.

It may have been loaded for NBA play but not for this three-point-shooting clam-bake, which included 21 treys by Lithuania in the bronze game. Stern refuses to accept that the U.S. team was—and American hoops in general is—fundamentally flawed. He is wrong, and the fact that no pure zone-busting shooter (or shooters) was added to the team shows how entrenched is the notion that Americans can outquick and outjump every opponent. In a 12-team tournament the U.S. ranked last from behind the arc in makes (5.5 per game) and 11th in percentage (31.4). Does the fact that the Angolans were better marksmen than NBA players seem peculiar? “I don’t think we’re going to go back and change our game,” said swingman Lamar Odom, who was a solid performer in Athens, “but some things you can incorporate, like the importance

the international teams place on shooting.”

There was a lot of talk about Americans being unaccustomed to the international rules, but Argentine point guard Pepe Sanchez, who has played for four NBA teams, wasn’t buying it. “They zoned us, we made threes, and they had to come out of the zone,” said Sanchez. “We zoned them, and they missed shots. What does

and Vince Carter have produced the gold? Who knows? In any case their absence does not validate the system. As long as NBA players are, in the words of ’92 Dream Team coach Chuck Daly, “individual Fortune 500 corporations,” many will treat national team play like the \$6.99 buffet at Ponderosa: somewhere to stop only if it’s convenient and nothing else is open. And

“They zoned us, we made threes, and they had to come out of the zone,” says Argentina’s Sanchez. “We zoned them, AND THEY MISSED SHOTS.”

this have to do with rules?” The dirty little secret of the American team was that it was also terrible defensively, not because the players didn’t try but because they were unaccustomed to sliding their feet, talking to one another and working around picks. Those, too, are fundamentals.

Much has also been said about the U.S.’s not having the same team in Athens that qualified last summer in Puerto Rico. Would the addition of Tracy McGrady, Jason Kidd, Jermaine O’Neal, Ray Allen

after the hostile reception this team got in Greece and the way it was vilified back home, the appeal of suiting up for the red, white and blue may be at an alltime low.

With Stern leading the charge, USA Basketball must create incentives for national team play, talk it up, convince the superstars that there are good reasons for donning a U.S. uniform (even if it’s just selling them on the endorsement opportunities). The onus is on the players too, especially some from this team who have been dragged through the mud. What is needed is a national team cheerleader, a role that Manu Ginobili plays for Argentina, which beat Italy 84–69 in the gold medal game. A respected figure like Tim Duncan would seem like a candidate, but his personality is not suited to the task. Nor does he have much love for the referees from basketball’s governing body. “FIBA sucks,” said Duncan after Saturday’s game. Sounds like the Duncans won’t be buying the Fodor’s guide to Beijing.

The man who seemed to be volunteering for the job was Duncan’s co-captain, Allen Iverson. After every game, victory or defeat, Iverson, the lightning rod for much of the invective directed at the NBA back home, was the one proffering the star-spangled sentiments. *It’s a dream come true for every basketball player. . . . You have to understand the things your country has brought you and you have to give something back. . . . I would advise anybody selected to a team like this to take that honor and cherish it.*

It’s one thing to proclaim your fealty to Mother Country and sign on for ’08 in the heat of Olympic competition, as many from this team besides Iverson did; it’s another to keep that commitment in your heart and persuade others that representing the U.S. is the right thing to do. Unless, of course, being the bronze standard is O.K. □

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS are not exactly a novelty in the NBA. But not all of the good ones are in the league, some because they haven’t been given the chance, others because they’re happy where they are. Here’s a lineup of Olympians who could prosper in the States.

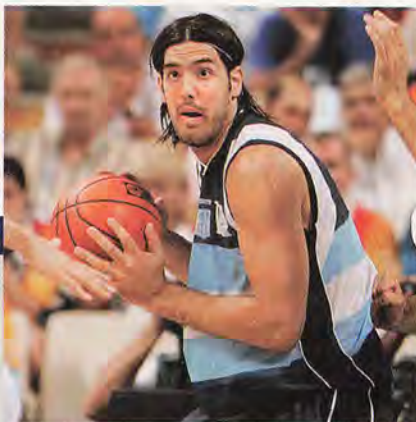
► **SARUNAS JASIKEVICIUS**, PG, Lithuania. Slick passer and devastating three-point marksman torched the U.S. with 28 points in a preliminary-round game. Known primarily as a shooter at Maryland and never got a look. Stars for Maccabi Tel Aviv.

► **RAMUNAS SISKASKAS**, SG, Lithuania. Also ignored by NBA teams and now with Benetton Treviso in Italy, this 25-year-old is known as the Baltic Scottie Pippen for his versatility.

► **JORGE GARBAJOSA**, SF, Spain. At 6’ 9”, shoots threes better than the respected guards on his team, Juan Carlos Navarro and Jose Manuel Calderon. Plays for Unicaja Malaga in Spain and has never gotten a tumble from the NBA.

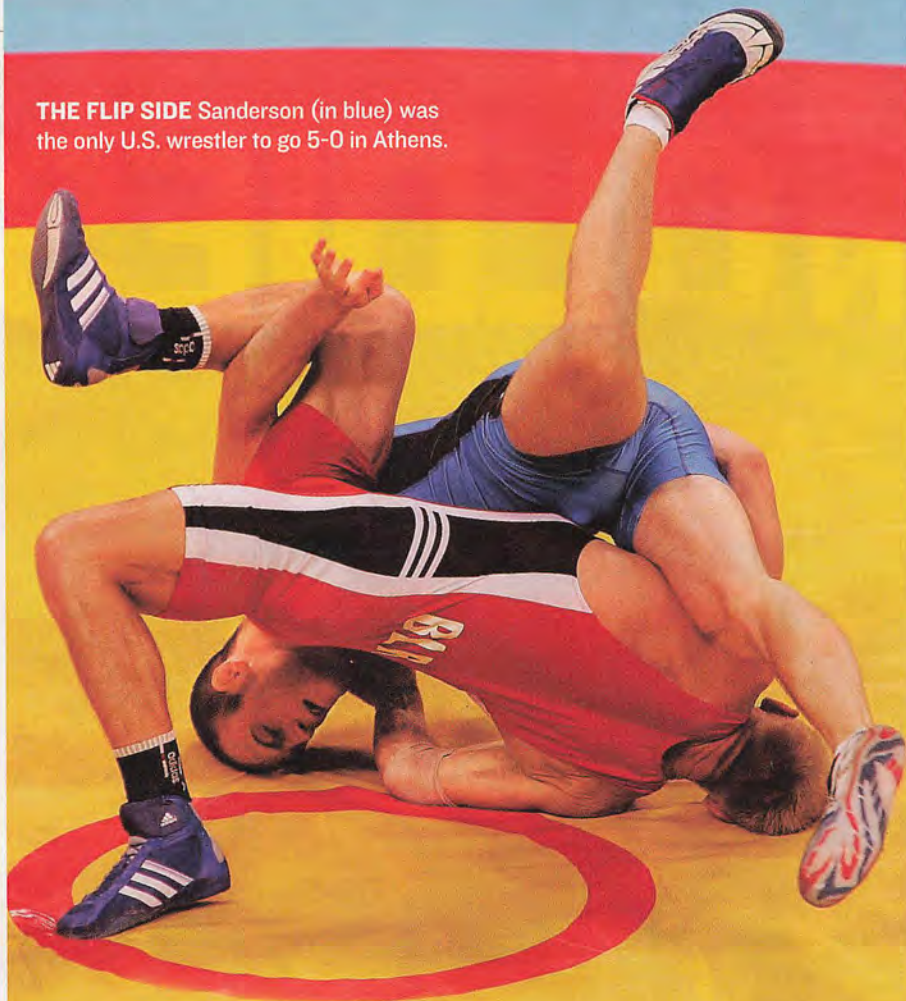
► **LUIS SCOLA**, PF, Argentina (above). Bullish but skilled. Led the Games with 65.5% shooting. A second-round pick of the Spurs in 2002, he plays for Tau Ceramica Vitoria in Spain.

► **FABRICIO OBERTO**, C, Argentina. A broken hand cost him a trial with the Knicks in ’99. Not as skilled as Scola but could help an NBA team. Stars for Pamesa Valencia in Spain. —J.M.



JOHN BREVEN

THE FLIP SIDE Sanderson (in blue) was the only U.S. wrestler to go 5-0 in Athens.



Another Streak Begins

Cael Sanderson added Olympic gold to his remarkable résumé

SCRAMBLING AT the edge of the mat last Saturday night, Cael Sanderson swiftly grabbed Moon Eui Jae around the legs and rag-dolled the 185-pound South Korean over his head. The blur of armpits and elbows would be worth two points and, about a minute and a half later, an Olympic freestyle championship. The self-effacing Sanderson, who won all five of his matches in Athens, later would say the maneuver had no name and would refer to it as lucky. But the creativity and strength of the move merit a formal designation. A Full Moon, perhaps?

The gold medal was around Sanderson's thickly corded neck, the albatross off it. His nonpareil 159-0 record at Iowa State from 1998 through 2002 had created a burden of expectations internationally, one that weighed on Sanderson despite a second-place finish last year in his first world freestyle championships. "The styles of wrestling are so different—I think this gold medal allows him to start over," said Sanderson's wife, Kelly, after a quick celebration with her husband. (Cael went nuts. He had the double cheeseburger.)

The U.S. freestyle team had won only two silvers at the 2003 worlds and was hoping to make amends in Athens. Things looked good when razor-edged 121-pounder Stephen Abas earned his first medal in major international competition, a silver, and 145.5-pounder Jamill Kelly, who had never won a high school state championship or an NCAA title, also won a surprising silver. "We all had a lot to prove coming off last year, so I guess people thought we came out of nowhere," Kelly said. "But we're still one of the wrestling powerhouses in the world, and we're still trying to improve."

But Sanderson's flipping Moon was beyond amelioration. It was a priceless example of wrestling art.

—Michael Farber

photograph by Nick Laham/Getty Images

A Golden Tribute

► After the U.S. team of **Misty May** and **Kerri Walsh** rolled to the women's beach volleyball gold, May left behind something dear to her on the court. Her father, **Butch**, had brought to Athens a prescription bottle containing some of the ashes of Misty's mother, **Barbara**, who died two years ago of lung cancer. Before the semifinals Misty (inset) scattered half the bottle on the court; after the final she returned with the rest.



When the Games began, May was still nursing an abdominal strain she suffered in June, but she and Walsh dominated as they had in winning 90 straight matches over the last two years. Said U.S. teammate **Elaine Youngs**, "They are simply the greatest team ever." —B.C.

Finally, Finishing the Job

► No one tried to sugarcoat it: Bronze wasn't the medal the U.S. women's water polo team had come for. "We had some emotional moments," captain **Heather Moody** said of the day off between the team's heartbreaking 6-5 semifinal loss to eventual champion Italy and its third-place match against Australia. "We'd set our hearts so much on getting to the championship game."

The world champion Americans were undone by a sudden inability to play with the lead. After jumping ahead of Canada 5-1 early in the tournament, they fell apart and lost 6-5. Italy, a team they'd dominated for the past year, came back from a 4-2 deficit and won on a goal with 2.2 seconds remaining. Against Australia, the U.S. blew a 5-1 lead before **Ellen Estes** scored her third goal of the game with 2:20 left to give the Americans a 6-5 victory. "It's nice to win bronze," said goaltender **Jackie Frank** (inset). "But it's not gold."



—E.M. Swift



2004 Olympics

GOLDEN OLDIES



BYE, FIVE Before Hamm (9) headed into retirement, she savored the win over Brazil with (inset, from left) Lilly, Foudy, Chastain and Fawcett.

In a fitting tribute to Mia Hamm and four other veterans, the U.S. women's soccer team showed its pluck with an overtime rally

BY GRANT WAHL

BRAZIL WAS HISTORY, a 2-1 victim in last Thursday's gold medal game, and now the U.S. women's soccer team's own one-name wonders—Mia, Brandi, Julie, Kristine and Joy—stood side by side like soccer's Mount Rushmore, screaming a heartfelt (if off-key) rendition of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Their work, begun in 1987, was done: two World Cup titles, two Olympic golds. "It's perfect," said striker Mia Hamm after her last competitive match, an overtime victory in Athens' cozy Karaiskaki Stadium. "Absolutely perfect." ♣ International soccer is supposed to be a young person's game. Yet there was

33-year-old U.S. captain Julie Foudy, two days removed from crutches, taking a cortisone shot for her sprained right ankle and playing 120 minutes in the midfield. There was 33-year-old Kristine Lilly, the relentless left winger, bending an elegant corner kick onto forward Abby Wambach's head for the 112th-minute game-winner. And there were Brandi Chastain and Joy Fawcett, two (gulp) 36-year-olds, steeling the bend-but-don't-break back line against an onslaught of Brazilian teenagers (who may well own women's soccer for the next decade).



Most of all there was Hamm, the 32-year-old icon whose record 153 international goals—a testament to talent, durability and sheer quantity of matches (266)—may never be touched. After creating the game-winner in a 2-1 win over Germany in the semis, Hamm had less of an impact in the final, but her characteristic willingness to track back and defend stifled several Brazilian attacks. Now, after a 10-game farewell exhibition tour, Hamm will be free to start the family she wants with husband Nomar Garciaparra. "Mia has carried the burden of soccer on her shoulders for nearly two decades," Foudy says. "And those shoulders are *tired!*"

Losses in the 2000 Olympics and the '03 World Cup had frustrated the U.S. women, but they had also humanized them, revealing a grace in defeat. The Games set the stage for a comeback that Hamm—the U.S. athletes' choice as flag bearer at the closing ceremonies—had long believed possible. "Our lives aren't just a series of successes," Hamm said. "There are a lot more failures than everyone sees. And the fact that these players responded in such a positive way says a lot about them." —Grant Wahl

What's Next?

► **Michael Phelps** will tour the U.S. with other Olympians to promote his sport, then return to action in October at the world short-course championships in Indianapolis.

► **Natalie Coughlin** will head back to Cal for the spring semester to complete her psychology degree.

► **Amanda Beard** (*inset*) will continue working toward a business degree at Arizona, where she'll be a senior.

► **Gary Hall Jr.** will attempt to launch a match-race series (with prize money) for top swimmers.

► **Carly Patterson** will take part in a 38-city U.S. tour with most of her Olympic teammates while starting 11th grade (through correspondence work) at Spring Creek Academy in Plano, Texas.

► **Paul Hamm** will perform in a rival 12-city gymnastics tour made up of international Olympians and in January will enroll with twin brother Morgan as a sophomore at Ohio State.

► **Lisa Fernandez** will pitch in the Ladies Pro Fastpitch Association, a new league set to launch in 2005.

► **Jennie Finch** will get married in October to Arizona Diamondbacks pitcher Casey Daigle.

► **Deena Kastor** will run the New York City Marathon in November, attempting to become the first American since 1994 to win one of the major U.S. marathons (Boston, New York, Chicago).



Pack Your Baguettes

► The IOC will choose the 2012 host city next July, and contingents from all five finalists were in Athens trying to win friends and votes.

As the Games closed, the favorite was Paris (*inset*), which would hold beach volleyball next to the Eiffel Tower, with London, Madrid and New York City a notch below, and Moscow bringing up the rear.



BOB ROSATO (SOCCER INSET), SIMON BRUTY (BEARD), MAL LANGSDON/REUTERS (PARIS)

THE RACE JUST STARTED

Running ahead of schedule, **China** made a move on the Olympic powers in Athens. As host in 2008, it expects to dominate

BY S.L. PRICE

THE FUTURE arrived last Friday. It came in the form of a Chinese athlete like none ever seen before: Doffing a T-shirt that gave equal play to the flag of his Communist country and the Nike swoosh, powered by fast-twitch muscles that most Chinese thought they could never develop, leading from the start an Olympic final that no Chinese man had ever competed in, Liu Xiang didn't just win the 110-meter hurdles in Athens. He crushed all rivals in a world-record-tying 12.91 seconds. Hurdlers from traditional Olympic powers U.S. and Cuba came next, a full three steps behind. Liu wrapped himself in the Chinese flag, and suddenly the world was looking at 2008. "The biggest medal for us, no question," said one of the dozens of Chinese journalists cheering Liu. "Welcome to Beijing!" ¶ Forgive the man for getting ahead of himself. Chinese reporters, officials and coaches were as shocked as anyone else by the 21-year-old Liu's triumph, not least because it came four years early.

Since July 2001, when Beijing won the right to host the 2008 Games, the Chinese sports machine has been geared toward peaking on its home turf, matching the city's already feverish construction program with athletic success. China took a young team to Athens, expecting tough losses but valuable seasoning, and instead showed that it's already the U.S.'s prime rival for Olympic supremacy. Consider this just the beginning of China's great leap forward: The U.S. easily won the overall medal count in Athens, with 103, but the

race for gold stayed neck and neck until the competition's end on Sunday, when the U.S. finished with 35 gold medals to China's 32.

"That's very surprising for me," said Houston Rockets center Yao Ming, who played for the Chinese basketball team, which fin-



SHOCK VALUE Liu surprised all Chinese, including himself, by winning the 110-meter hurdles in world-record-tying time.

ished eighth in Athens. "Eight years ago in the Atlanta Olympics we had 16 gold medals, but now 20 is nothing. It's like in China we say, 'The beans out of the bottle.' We're getting better."

Russia was runner-up to the U.S., with 92 overall medals to China's 63, but only 27 were gold. No one's counting out the bear just yet, but Chinese officials are stalking bigger game. "In the next four years we have a lot to do," said Gu Yaoming, general secretary of the Chinese Olympic Committee (COC). "To have a success-

ful Olympic Games, first we have to have good facilities and management, and second our athletes should win more medals, more gold medals. It's very hard to pass the United States. I don't say in the year 2008 we can pass the United States. But we will try."

No one should doubt it. The number of Chinese gold medals in Athens wasn't nearly as significant as some of the events in which they were won. Aside from Liu's sprint medal, the Chinese also won the women's doubles in tennis, the women's 100-meter breaststroke and the 500-meter race in two-man canoeing. "A breakthrough," said one of the canoeists, Guanliang Meng, "since we had not participated in this event before." China had developed women distance runners before, but here was another surprise: Just as Liu's victory was sinking in, Huina Xing coasted to win the women's 10,000 meters. "Two miracles," Gu said.

Hardly. Liu and Huina are products of the COC's decade-old 119 Project, which is dedicated to improving China's performance in swimming, aquatics and track and field, which account for 119 of the 301 Olympic gold medals. Some \$50 million a year (half from the government, half from corporate sponsors) is dedicated to the care and training of athletes. And, in its effort to go beyond the usual Chinese specialties of diving, artistic gymnastics, table tennis, volleyball and weightlifting, China has been hiring foreign coaches. It brought six to Athens, including U.S. basketball coach Del Harris, who, shadowed by a translator, spent the last four months shaping Yao and an inexperienced cadre of players into a team. "I have never coached a group I had more respect for," Harris said.

Still, Harris had never met a challenge like this. Only Yao and Harris's translator knew English, and the 67-year-old coach had to wean his charges from five-hour practices and a culture of deference that extended all the way to the paint. "You can't," Harris told his team, "say, 'Sorry, I fouled you' or 'Please, take this rebound.'" In the end it all came together. In pool play China played smart and hard, and it scored a great upset over world champion Serbia and Montenegro. "For China to pull that one out?" said NBA commissioner David Stern. "It means that they're coming."

That was the great subtext of the Athens Games, despite the fact that we've heard it before. China, with 1.3 billion people, has long been considered the sleeping giant of sports, an unstoppable force if it would only open its eyes. And though the country's medal count has steadily grown in every Olympics since a team from mainland China returned to the Games in 1984, the gains have been matched by setbacks. Being seen as a brutal dictatorship by Western countries contributed to Beijing's narrowly losing the vote to host the 2000 Games to Sydney in 1993. A rising group of Chinese swimmers emerged that year, but many tested positive for doping in 1994. And just before the 2000 Olympics (and the ensuing vote on the host city for 2008), China yanked 27 athletes with spotty tests, including six women distance runners, from the roster going to Sydney. For the moment, anyway, the Chinese seem clean; of the top three powers in Athens, only China sailed through without BALCO-like rumblings or a positive test.

Instead, the Chinese delegation obsessed over daily medal counts and its racial inferiority complex. The day before Liu equaled the Afro-British Colin Jackson's 11-year-old world record

in the 110-meter hurdles, Xiao Tian, deputy secretary general of the COC, all but surrendered China's chances of ever developing a world-class sprinter. "Notice the phenomenon in the 100 meters, there are very few white people," Xiao said. "Mostly blacks. So we have to focus on our stronger sports."

China's track and field coach, Feng Shuyong, attributed Liu's win to his technical skills because "physically we Asians are not as good as Europeans and Africans." Yet Liu's triumph could begin to change such thinking. On Friday night, after dedicating his victory to his country, Asia and "all the yellow-skinned people," Liu went into his press conference and said, "Because I'm Chinese and [have] the physiology of the Asian race, to me this is a miracle. But because of it, now I expect more miracles in the future."

He's far from alone. "This is the tip of the iceberg," says Mark Wetmore, an agent who represents China's track and field athletes internationally. During Liu's medal ceremony, Wetmore turned to those sitting around him in Olympic Stadium and said, "Better learn this national anthem. You're going to hear it a lot in 2008."

It will be a different Olympics, of course. One virtue of dictatorships is that Olympic venues—if not the trains—arrive on time, and it's already clear that the delays that marred Athens's preparations won't be repeated in Beijing. All venues are set to be completed by 2007, and there'll be none of that Greek hand-wringing over cost, either; at the reception held by Beijing officials on Saturday night, the director of China's tourist bureau announced that about \$62 billion would be spent on facilities, environmental protection and civic upgrades for the Games. No one gasped. The authorities will face hard questions about human rights over the next four years, but their strategy is already obvious.

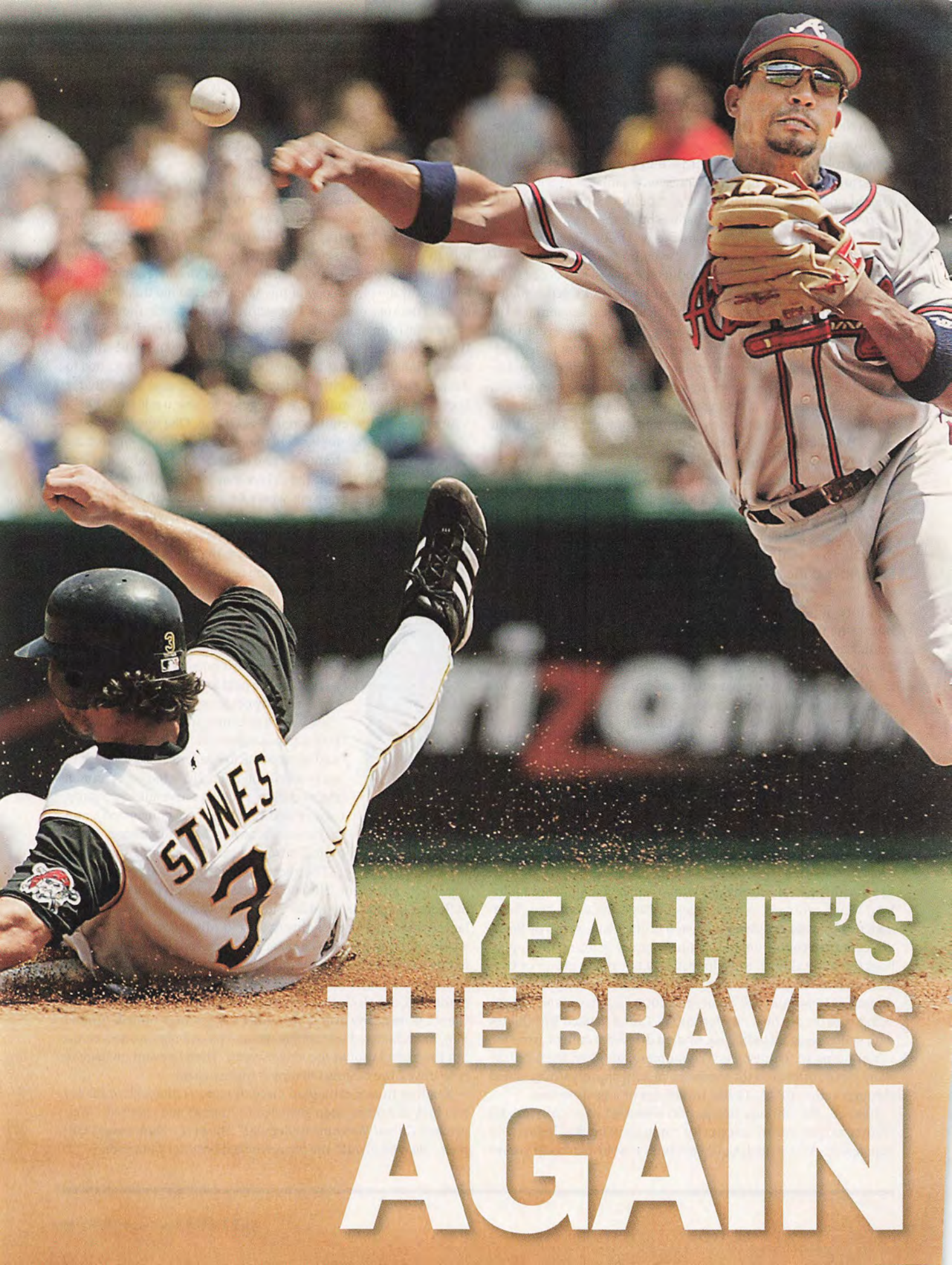
"We hope to concentrate mainly on sports performance rather than human rights," Xiao said in response to a reporter's question. "I'm sorry to tell you the understanding of human rights differs as far as nationalities, history, culture and religions [are concerned], and maybe conflict will arise in discussion of this topic. I'm sorry I cannot elaborate further."

The reception was no place for that discussion, in any event. The cool air was filled with polite speeches, deflected questions, applause for every ringing phrase. Chinese lanterns hung over the lights at the old Athens Tennis Club, and a video showed gorgeous footage of pandas and temples and one happy Chinese citizen after another. Under the trees, in the front row, Athens mayor Dora Bakoyannis, who as much as anyone embodied the city's resilient spirit, sat next to Liu Xiang. Her Games were nearly over. The hurdler's Nikes were untied. Around him, men chattered into cellphones and passed out business cards, but Liu stared rapt at the video screen. Then he went onstage to help unveil the Beijing Olympics' tourism logo.

Reading from a crumpled piece of paper, Liu spoke of his joy and luck in Athens, then switched to English and shouted, "Welcome to China! Welcome to Beijing!" The performance was complete. He smiled, and the future looked brighter than ever. □



MAKING WAVES In winning the 100-meter breaststroke, Xuejuan Luo gave China a new specialty.



**YEAH, IT'S
THE BRAVES
AGAIN**

ONCE UPON A TIME there was baseball in October without the Atlanta Braves . . . a time when the Braves weren't collecting division titles the way a traveling salesman racks up frequent-flier miles, a time when Atlanta was just another scuffling mid-market franchise. These days, however, trying to remember when the Braves were not in the postseason is like imagining New Year's Eve before Dick Clark. "Sure, I know that the Braves were bad once, but boy, it's been a long, long time," says rookie first baseman Adam LaRoche, who was a fifth-grader at Salem Lutheran School in Spring, Texas, in 1990, the last full season in which Atlanta didn't finish first in its division. "You walk into the clubhouse, put on your uniform, and you just feel that expectation of winning that this team has been about for so long."

This being the start of September, it should come as no shock that the Braves are atop the National League East and in a familiar mode: cruise control. After beating the San Francisco Giants on Monday afternoon at Turner Field for their eighth win in nine games, the Braves had a nine-game lead in their quest for an unprecedented 13th straight division title. But while first-place finishes have become as common in Atlanta as Ted Turner and Coca-Cola, the Braves' dominance this year is, in fact, a big surprise—even to the players themselves.

"I just shake my head that we're in first and have the lead we have," says closer John Smoltz, the only player to have been on all 12 division winners (though he sat out the 2000 season recovering from Tommy John surgery on his right elbow). "If anyone here is telling you they're not surprised we are where we are, you might want to give him a lie-detector test. Like a lot of people, I got caught up with all that talk predicting our demise."

Indeed, this was the year the Braves' Golden Age was supposed to end. This was, after all, the first time in 18 years that Atlanta would be without any of its longtime trio of aces—Greg Maddux (signed as a free agent last winter by the Chicago Cubs after 11 years in Atlanta), Tom Glavine (who left

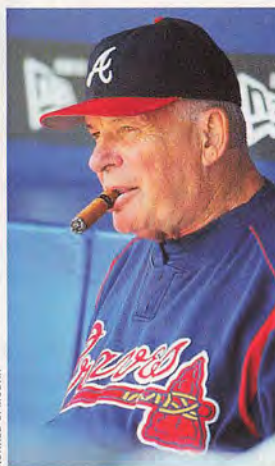
for the New York Mets following the 2002 season, his 16th with the Braves) and Smoltz (a 12-year starter who became the closer in the second half of 2001)—in the rotation. The Braves would also have to cope with the off-season free-agent departures of three All-Stars: rightfielder Gary Sheffield, catcher Javy Lopez and third baseman Vinny Castilla, who drove in 35% of their runs and mashed 104 of their

franchise-record 235 homers in 2003. Many baseball cognoscenti predicted that Atlanta would finish in the middle of the NL East pack, behind the young, world-champion Florida Marlins and one of last winter's biggest upgraders, the Philadelphia Phillies.

"Given the losses we had over the winter and a cut in payroll, the challenge to build a championship-caliber team was more daunting than in past years," says general manager John Schuerholz, who was ordered in the off-season by owner Time Warner (also SI's parent

company) to slash last season's \$95 million payroll by \$15 million. "But that didn't diminish our confidence. There were a lot of people who wrote us off, and that bothered me. After 12 years of this you'd think someone would say, 'You know, those guys know what they're doing.'"

Now in his 14th season, Schuerholz is the longest-tenured general manager in the four major pro sports. From 1991, his first season, through 2003 the Braves won 1,245 regular-season games, more than any other major league team. (The Yankees were second, with 1,170.) If Schuerholz is



RONALD C. MOORE

SMOKIN' Rafael Furcal & Co. can play D, but Cox's crew has won with pitching.

Everybody said Atlanta's run was over, at long last. But look who's back in control of the National League East

BY ALBERT CHEN

MOUND MAKEOVERS

Thanks to Leo Mazzone, the Braves' Jaret Wright has made a remarkable turnaround. Here are four other former underachievers enjoying career years thanks to some magic from their pitching coaches

DOUG DAVIS, *Brewers*

	W-L	ERA	K/9	BB/9	HR/9
Pre-2004	28-29	4.79	5.40	3.94	1.07
2004	10-10	3.58	7.11	3.27	0.68

Davis, who was drafted by the Texas Rangers in 1996 and pitched in the majors for them in parts of five seasons from 1999 to 2003, had been wrapping his arm far behind his body during his windup, then slingshotting the ball from a three-quarters arm slot. Second-year pitching coach Mike Maddux brought the lefty's arm closer to his body and instructed him to throw over the top; that has improved his control and added juice to his fastball, which now touches 90 mph. A cut fastball that Davis runs in on righties—also a Maddux addition—has completed the transformation.

RYAN DRESE, *Rangers*

	W-L	ERA	K/9	BB/9	HR/9
Pre-2004	13-15	6.10	6.22	4.13	1.02
2004	11-7	3.65	3.96	2.48	0.63

In his fourth big league season Drese has blossomed into Texas's ace primarily because of his heavy sinking fastball, a pitch he began experimenting with last winter. In spring training pitching coach Orel Hershisser, a sinkerballer during his own career, had Drese raise his arm slot and take a little off his two-seamer, sacrificing speed for location and movement. Drese, who opened the season at Triple A, has a 2.42-to-1 ground-ball-to-fly-ball ratio (fifth highest in the majors), and by keeping the ball down, he's cut his homers allowed by almost 40%.



BEFORE AND AFTER
The Brewers' Davis altered the angled arm of his Texas days.

JASON MARQUIS, *Cardinals*

	W-L	ERA	K/9	BB/9	HR/9
Pre-2004	14-15	4.45	6.38	4.04	1.17
2004	13-4	3.59	5.98	3.04	1.14

Like Drese, Marquis is relying more on his sinker: Witness his 2.23-to-1 ground-ball-to-fly-ball ratio. In four seasons with Atlanta the righthander showed impressive stuff, including a mid-90s four-seamer that the club encouraged him to feature, reserving his sinker for lefthanders, especially with men on base. But as he shuffled from the rotation to the bullpen to the minors, Marquis was never comfortable. Traded to St. Louis last off-season, he found a regular starting role and a pitching coach in Dave Duncan, who urged him to make the sinker his out pitch.

JOE NATHAN, *Twins*

	Sv.-Opp.	ERA	K/9	BB/9	HR/9
Pre-2004	1-5	4.12	6.76	4.80	1.22
2004	35-38	1.71	11.02	3.41	0.47

Minnesota, which acquired Nathan from the Giants in the off-season, opened the door for the fifth-year righthander by giving him the chance to close. Pitching coach Rick Anderson helped Nathan correct his biggest mechanical flaw—rushing his delivery, which costs him velocity on his fastball. (When he's right, he's in the mid-to-high 90s.) Nathan doesn't feel overworked; he has just one multi-inning save. Fresh and fit, Nathan has his fastball and hard slider at their best and has significantly increased his strikeout rate.

—Daniel G. Habib

the Da Vinci of G.M.'s, then this year's team may turn out to be his *Mona Lisa*. Two of his most heavily criticized moves from the last two years—trading righthander Kevin Millwood to Philadelphia for catcher Johnny Estrada in 2002, and acquiring oft-injured rightfielder J.D. Drew and utilityman Eli Marrero from the St. Louis Cardinals for righthander Jason Marquis and lefty reliever Ray King—have paid off big this summer. Through Monday, Drew was hitting .307, had set career highs in home runs (29) and RBIs (81), and for the first time in six years hadn't spent any time on the disabled list. Estrada, the Braves' lone All-Star representative in Houston in July, was batting .332 (sixth best in the NL) with eight homers and 66 RBIs.

Atlanta's minimal All-Star representation was a reflection of the fact that, for the first three months of the season, the Braves were no better than the doomsayers had predicted. Atlanta carried a 33-38 record into a

three-game series against the Baltimore Orioles on June 25—a weekend that many players consider the season's turning point. Before the first game, manager Bobby Cox, typically a stoic leader (unless he's boasting about his NASCAR fantasy team), addressed his club with an unusually emotional speech. His message: Play together, back each other up, and everything will be O.K.

"More than ever," says Smoltz, "with the younger guys we have, Bobby has felt compelled to express confidence in the team, and his Psych 101 approach has been effective." The Braves won two of three against Baltimore—including a comeback from a 7-0 deficit in the finale—then went 41-15, the best record in the majors during that span. Says righthanded starter Paul Byrd, "[Before the Baltimore series] it was just an uneasy clubhouse. We had a lot of frustration. Bobby cleaned up our clubhouse with about five minutes of talking. It's like that old commercial:

"When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen."

The Braves' hot August—they had won 19 of 27 games through Monday—coincided with the dramatic turnaround of third baseman Chipper Jones. The switch-hitter began August with a .223 average and 14 home runs, but his two-run shot in Friday's 5-3 win over the Giants was his ninth in 14 games and 11th for the month. Even so, the Atlanta offense (fifth in the league in runs, with 645) is nowhere near the juggernaut it was last season; this year's Braves were on pace to hit 59 fewer homers and score 103 fewer runs than they did last season.

Just like old times, it is the top of the rotation that has propelled Atlanta. The new Big Three, righthanders Russ Ortiz (13-7, 3.86 ERA after Sunday's loss to the Giants) and Jaret Wright (13-6, 3.20) and lefthander Mike Hampton (10-9, 4.90), combined for 19 straight wins from July 1 to Aug. 16, a stretch of excellence unmatched even by

Maddux, Glavine and Smoltz, who had six Cy Youngs for Atlanta among them. "Other teams may not fear us like they feared those great rotations of the past, but we feel we can be just as good," says Ortiz.

Wright has been the team's most unlikely success story. In 18 starts from May 27 through last weekend he went 11-1 with a 2.79 ERA. On Friday night he allowed three runs in seven innings to collect his career-high 13th win. "He's the best pitcher in the National League right now," says Braves pitching coach Leo Mazzone.

It's been a Lazarus-like resurrection for Wright, who seven years ago won three postseason games for the Cleveland Indians as a 21-year-old rookie and became the second-youngest Game 7 starter in World Series history. The cocksure son of former major leaguer Clyde Wright seemed destined for greatness, but a series of right shoulder ailments quickly derailed his career: After a 12-win sophomore season Wright landed on the disabled list twice in '99, then had two shoulder surgeries in the next two years. He was 7-9 with a 7.27 ERA from 2000 to 2002, when he was released by the Indians at season's end.

A year ago, struggling as a reliever with the San Diego Padres (8.37 ERA in 47½ in-



[last year], he was just a hard, hard thrower who was all over the place," says Mazzone, whose long list of successful reclamation projects includes Hampton, Chris Hammond, John Burkett, Mike Remlinger and Rudy Seanez. "What Jaret's learned here is that 90-percent effort on pitches with better location is better than throwing the ball as hard as you can with less location. Throwing with less effort, his delivery has become much smoother and more consistent."

A pitcher who once relied on overpowering hitters with a blazing fastball, Wright now unleashes his mid-90s heater only rarely. Mazzone also helped Wright develop a two-seam sinker that has become a primary weapon. After Wright faced four batters and retired the side without allowing a run in the first inning of his first start as a Brave in April, he found Mazzone in the dugout and asked, "Is that all there is to it?"

Since coming to Atlanta, Wright has also increased weight training on his shoulders to improve his stamina. He acknowledges that his hefty rookie-year workload—between his minor and major league starts he logged 216 innings, including the postseason—might have contributed to his injury problems. At week's end his 152 innings were his most since 1998.

Cox gave an unusually emotional speech. **HIS MESSAGE: PLAY TOGETHER, BACK EACH OTHER UP,** and everything will be O.K.

nings), Wright wondered if he'd even be pitching in the majors in 2004. Despite Wright's ugly numbers, Schuerholz, on the recommendation of four scouts who were impressed with the velocity and life on the righthander's pitches, put in a claim on Wright when the Padres placed him on waivers in August. When San Diego manager Bruce Bochy called Wright in his Houston hotel room to tell him that he'd been picked up by the Braves (the only team to claim him), Wright thought Bochy had dialed a wrong number. "I was shocked that someone wanted me," he says. "But there was nothing that was going to change for me in San Diego. I was going to finish the year struggling in the bullpen and come back in the spring and have to fight for a job. *Everything* changed when I went to Atlanta."

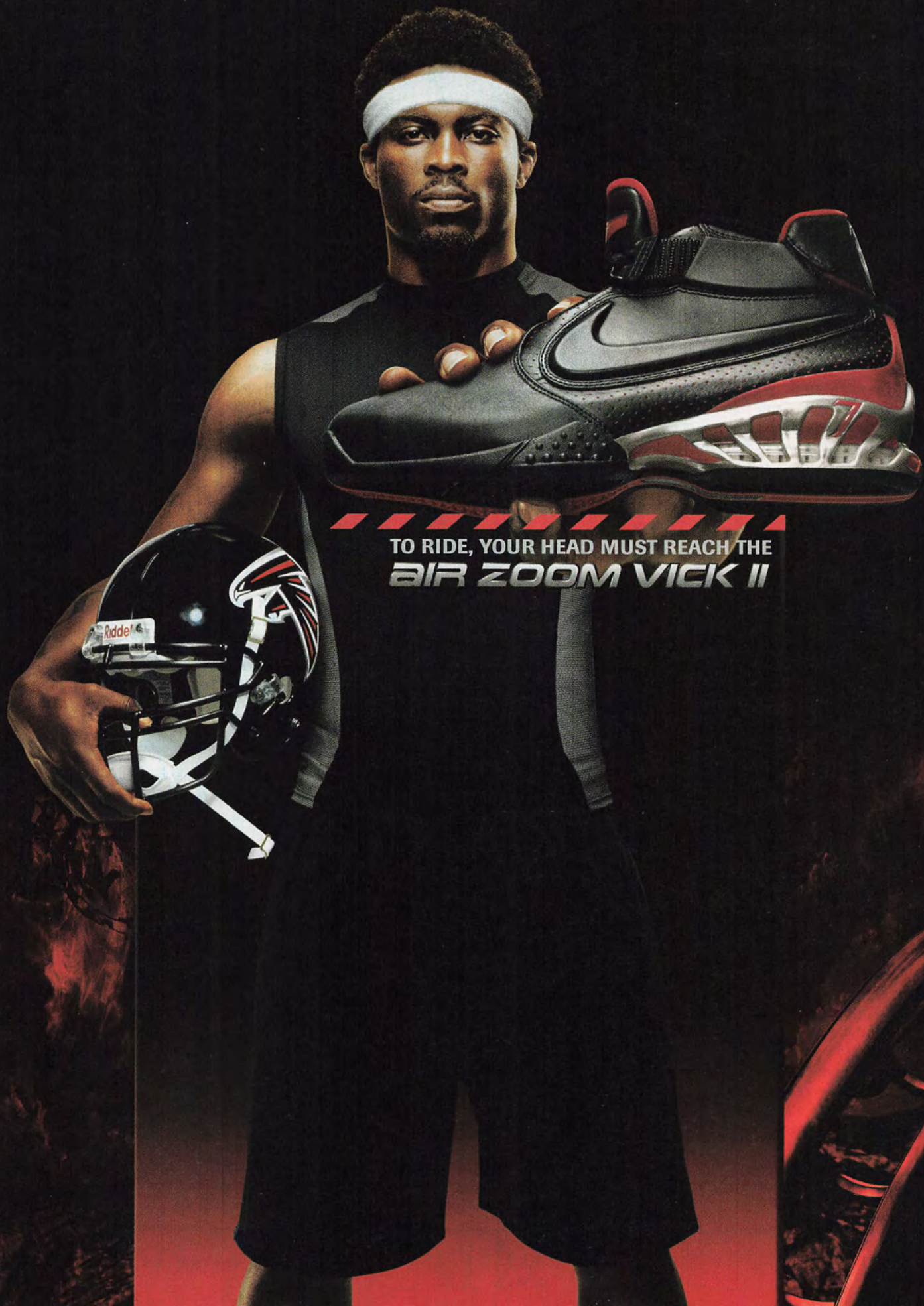
Wright has thrived under the tutelage of Mazzone, a guru renowned for revitalizing floundering careers. "When I first saw him



BATTERY POWER Despite paring payroll, Atlanta has kept winning thanks to shrewd additions like Wright (top) and Estrada.

So, can the unlikely trio of Ortiz-Wright-Hampton keep the Braves rolling? While it may seem premature to start sizing up potential playoff opponents ("I like our chances against the Cardinals," one Braves player said last weekend, "but the Cubs scare me to death"), it would take a historic collapse at this point for Atlanta to miss the postseason. No league or division leader has ever blown a lead of eight or more games after Sept. 1.

Having proved their doubters wrong thus far, the Braves will soon set about trying to get another monkey off their backs: Their 12 straight postseason appearances have produced but one world championship, and that was nine years ago. "Given the lower expectations and how far this team has come, this is already one of the most special years in our run," says Smoltz. "But that doesn't mean our standard is different. We're still here to win the World Series." □



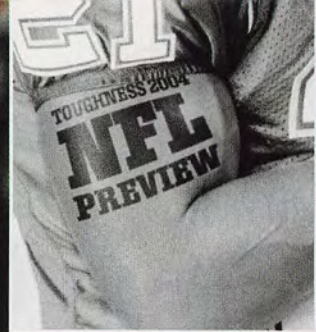
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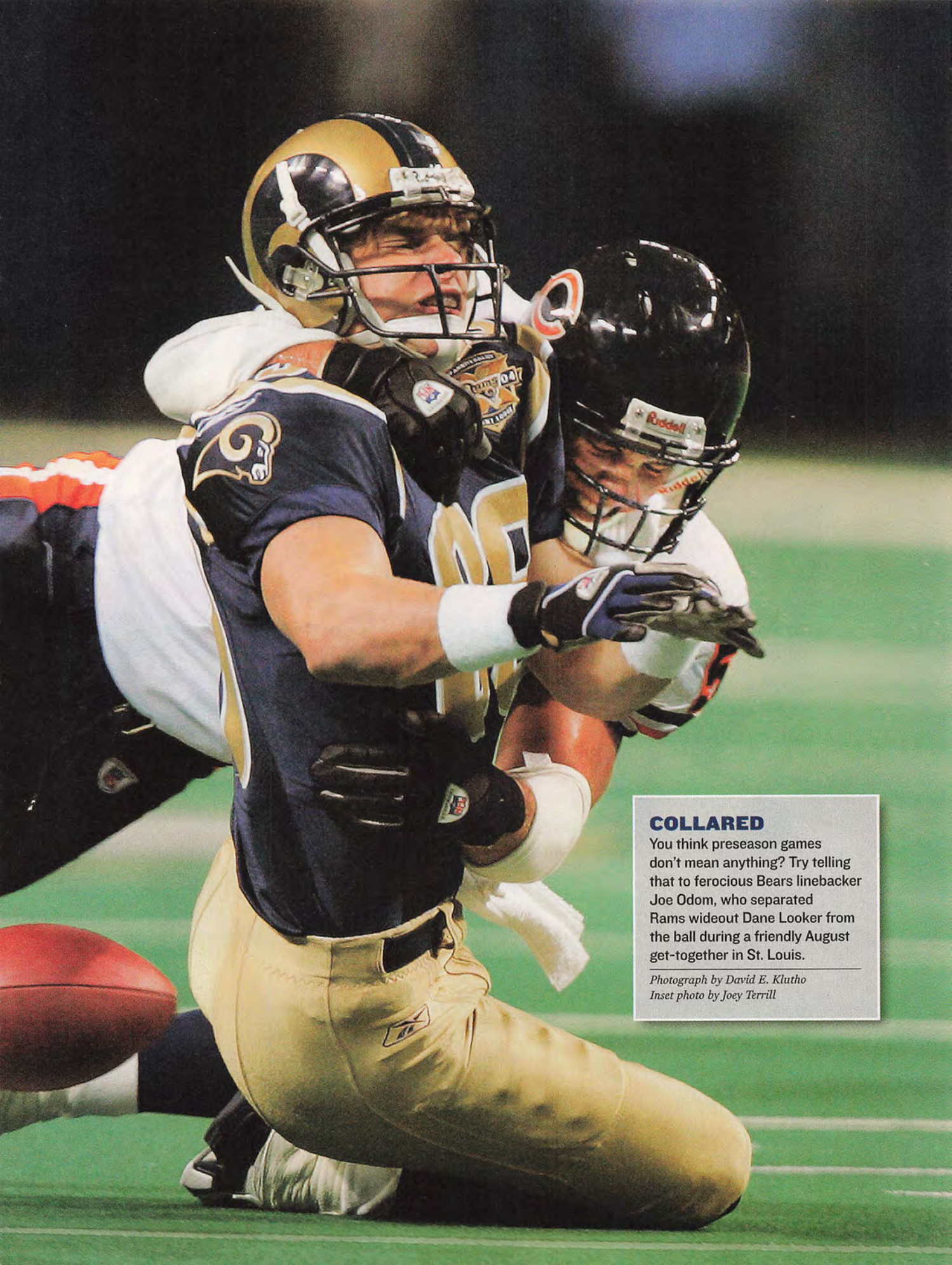
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NFL 2004

TOUGH GUYS

Every team wants them, and every coach cherishes the ones he's got. They deliver hits that change a game's momentum and withstand blows that keep drives alive. In the following pages, behold the NFL's toughest.



COLLARED

You think preseason games don't mean anything? Try telling that to ferocious Bears linebacker Joe Odom, who separated Rams wideout Dane Looker from the ball during a friendly August get-together in St. Louis.

*Photograph by David E. Klutho
Inset photo by Joey Terrill*



TOUGH GUYS

DETERMINED

You want durable? Look no further than the Packers' Brett Favre, who has made 189 consecutive regular-season starts, an NFL record for a QB. In '03 Favre led the league in touchdown throws while playing 12 games with a broken bone in his passing thumb.

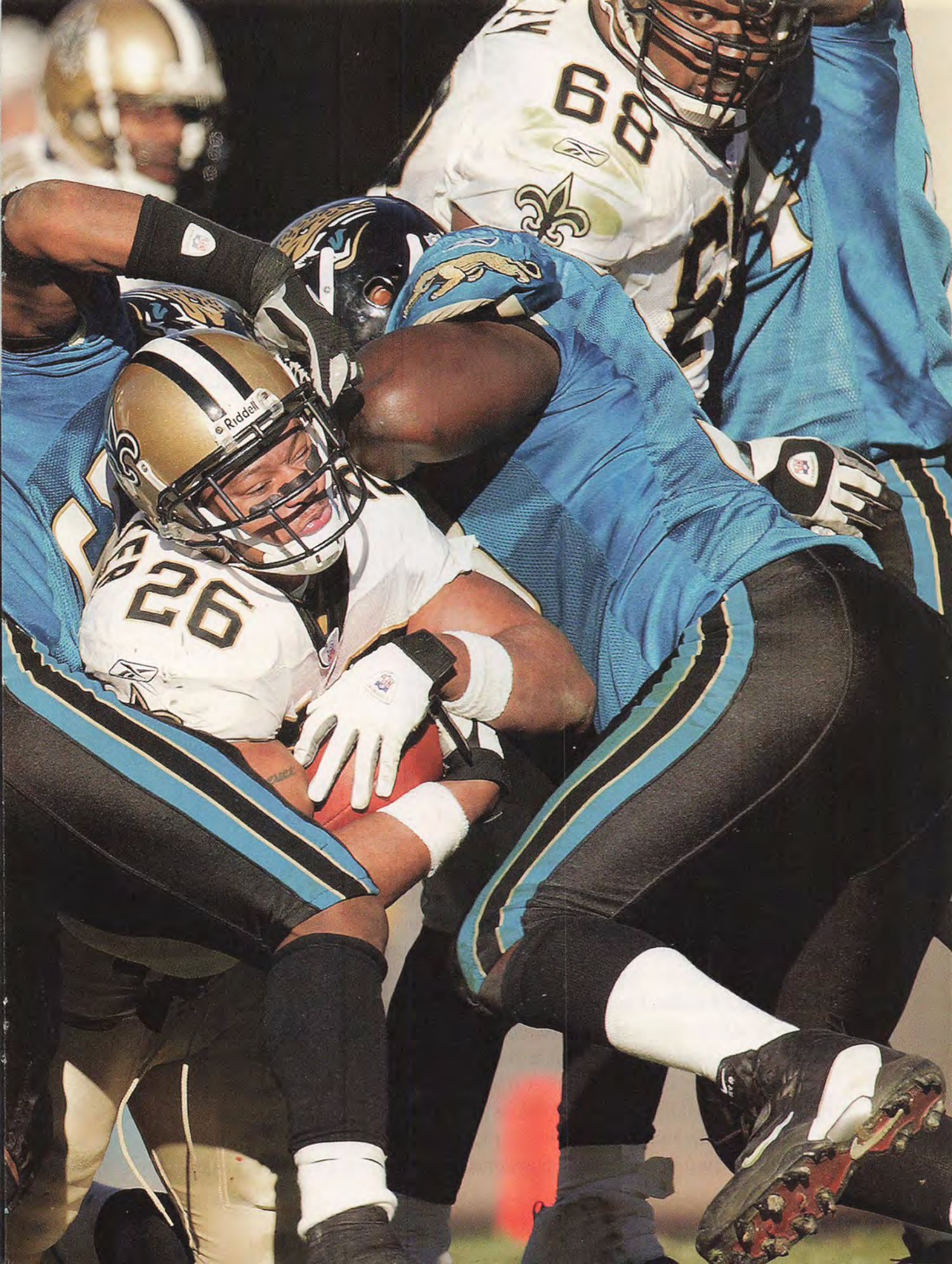
Photograph by Simon Bruty

TOUGH GUYS

SQUEEZED

Deuce McCallister, the Saints' Pro Bowl back, is among the most punishing runners in the league, but yards are hard to come by against a suffocating Jaguars defense that ranked second in the league against the rush in '03.

Photograph by John Biever



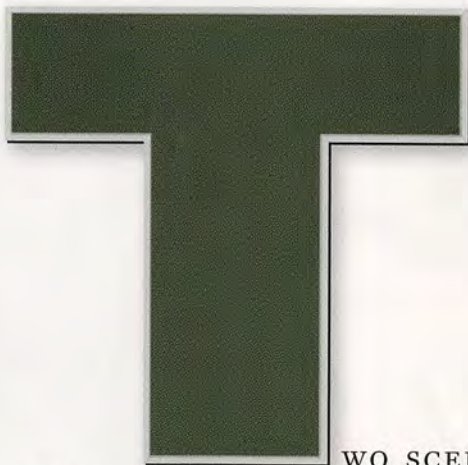


WILL THEY STILL BE SMILING IN JANUARY?

Tough-as-nails **DONOVAN MCNABB** finally has a big-play receiver, but the Eagles' title hopes could rest on whether he can keep **TERRELL OWENS** happy

BY PETER KING

Photograph by Al Tielemans



WO SCENES FROM ONE DAY at training camp paint conflicting pictures of a conflicted man. ¶ Scene I: After a morning practice in early August, new Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Terrell Owens chafed at how often coach Andy Reid runs full-speed scrimmage drills during camp. That's how Reid, with the best record (46–18) in the NFL since the start of the 2000 season, runs his camp, but that doesn't mean Owens has to like it. Linebacker Jeremiah Trotter had flattened Owens in one of those live sessions, leaving the wideout with an aching hip. "To go live, you risk key guys getting hurt—and I feel like I'm one of the key guys," Owens said, in remarks that would make headlines the next day. "In San Francisco, we never went live." ¶ Scene II: After lunch Owens and roommate Donovan McNabb, the Pro Bowl quarterback, returned to their Lehigh University dorm suite to relax before the afternoon practice. McNabb fell into a couch to chat with a visitor. Owens, in street clothes, made a beeline for the middle of the living room and the slanted ab board that he had brought to camp. With his head positioned near the floor and his toes a good three



Donovan McNabb
(left); Terrell Owens

feet higher at the other end of the board, the 6' 3", 227-pound Owens did 10 crunches in about 15 seconds. "Just trying to get ready," he said, after he got back on his feet.

There is no way to underestimate the pressure on the two men in this room, particularly on Owens, who can be alternately maddening and charming. He's a chronic complainer. He's a workout machine. But most of all he's a perfect fit for a big-play-starved offense, as his 81-yard touchdown reception on the Eagles' first play from scrimmage in their second preseason game showed. He's a player who can get Philly over the hump and into the Super Bowl.

Here's why the Owens-McNabb partnership will succeed: The controversial Owens practically begged Reid for the chance to play in Philly, and he doesn't want to screw up this opportunity—especially when so many critics are waiting for him to do just that. Plus, this is McNabb's team, the way the Baltimore Ravens are Ray Lewis's, and you don't mess with McNabb's locker room. For his part McNabb wants to prove he can throw downfield, and for the first time in six years he's got one of the NFL's best deep threats.

Here's why the Owens-McNabb partnership will fail: Owens can be a hopeless me-first guy who in the midst of consecutive two-catch games might erupt in a coach's face on the sideline. He'll use the media to

THE SITUATION in Philly is so much different for Owens than it was in San Francisco, where for most of his eight seasons he was star-caliber but couldn't hold a candle to the likes of Jerry Rice and Steve Young in the eyes of the 49ers faithful. In Philadelphia, Owens has already achieved a kind of rock-star status. A routine catch, with no coverage, was enough to make the large crowds at Eagles camp in Bethlehem, Pa., cheer wildly. "Fans believe he's here to make things all better," says Julie Dubin, the club's manager of community relations. One day Owens was doing an interview while about 500 autograph hounds stood about 50 yards away. After a half hour one man screamed, "We want T.O.! Share him! He's *ours*!"

These people don't care that two years ago Owens had the audacity to whip out a Sharpie during a nationally televised prime-time game and sign the ball he had just carried into the end zone. Or that more than once last season he publicly ripped his quarterback Jeff Garcia for, among other things, having a weak arm—and then suggested Garcia was homosexual in an interview that was published in the September issue of *Playboy*. Philly fans are ready to put Owens on the same pedestal as McNabb. And the quarterback seems willing to share the glory.

In August, NFL honeymoons look like they'll last forever, and as they lounged in

I was griping to get the ball more. Jerry Rice did the same thing I did, wanting the ball. But [the media] looks at me like I'm the worst guy on earth."

"Our philosophy is to take what the defense gives us," McNabb said, "and we're not going to change. There'll be games in which he has nine catches, five catches, three catches. He's not going to change my game. He's going to enhance it."

That was evident in the first full-contact intrasquad scrimmage of the summer. The offense drove 70 yards in seven plays—Owens caught three passes—with the precision Reid and offensive coordinator Brad Childress envisioned when Philadelphia worked a three-way trade for Owens in March. (The Eagles gave up a fifth-round draft pick to the Ravens and defensive lineman Brandon Whiting to San Francisco; an earlier trade, in which Owens went from the 49ers to the Ravens, was voided. After he landed in Philly, Owens signed a seven-year, \$42 million contract.)

The plan is to move Owens around in various formations, and to illustrate that point, Childress pulled out the tape of the scrimmage drive in which Owens caught the three passes. "Go back to how the 49ers used Jerry Rice," Childress said. "He was the most displaced wide receiver in the league." On the first play Owens was split right and ran a 21-yard cross; with the de-

JOHN W. McDONOUGH

If Owens can learn anything from McNabb about playing in Philly, it's

snipe at the play-calling or the quarterback's performance. (Never mind that he drops a lot of balls—18 last season.) Owens could become similarly frustrated with the Eagles because, for all his athleticism and leadership ability, McNabb is a below-average passer (57.0 career completion percentage) in a quarterback-friendly offense.

In top form, Owens and McNabb are two of the toughest competitors in the NFL, players who can turn a game around with one spectacular play. But it was made clear in the Eagles' three straight NFC Championship Game defeats, and in the Niners' inability to control their pass-catching man-child, that these two players ultimately need one another to get to the Super Bowl.

Whether they can coexist and thrive under the no-nonsense direction of Reid in an NFL-mad city is the most intriguing story heading into the 2004 season.

their dorm suite, Owens and McNabb wanted to think only sweet thoughts. They reluctantly responded to grim hypothetical situations based on past incidents. For instance: So what happens, Owens was asked, if he goes a couple of weeks catching only two or three balls?

"Why do people say that?" McNabb said, cutting in. But before he could continue, Owens piped up.

"As long as we're winning and being productive, I'm fine with that," the wideout said. "A couple of years ago, against the Giants, I only caught a couple of passes [four, actually, for 41 yards], but we won the game. I was cool with it. I blocked downfield. But after the game everyone thought

EARLY IMPRESSION On his first play in front of the home crowd, Owens caught an 81-yard touchdown pass from McNabb.





HELP IS ON THE WAY

As every opponent's target on an offense with no other stars, McNabb took his lumps last season.

that you have to have a **SENSE OF HUMOR** along with thick skin.



fense respecting wideout Todd Pinkston's speed by double-teaming him deep with a safety, McNabb hit Owens in stride. On the second play Owens motioned from the left flank and moved all the way across the formation, then ran a quick out and caught an 11-yard pass near the right sideline. On the third, with McNabb sprinting right, Owens took off from the right inside slot, dashed to the flat and caught a four-yard pass. Three catches from three different starting points, 35 yards.

"T.O. is going to make our system better," Childress said. "He wants to be so good so bad. Plus, this is the best camp Donovan's ever had. I think part of it is, when you put a world-class, competitive athlete with Donovan, himself a world-class, competitive athlete, it brings out the best in both of them."

At the same time Childress realizes that

Owens's competitiveness can bring out the worst in the wideout, too. He knows all about how Owens ripped into San Francisco offensive coordinator Greg Knapp on the sideline during a game against the Minnesota Vikings last year, but Childress doesn't expect that to happen to him. "The key with T.O. is communication," he says, "to always tell him where he stands."

But it is just as important for Owens to settle differences with teammates, coaches and the front office through proper channels and with respect for authority. "T.O. didn't communicate with his teammates directly," says Garcia, now with the Cleveland Browns. "He communicated through the press. The public way T.O. demonstrated his emotions just wasn't healthy. He created a huge sense of destruction within the team. When you talk to people who've been on his team, you never hear the words 'teammate'

or 'team player' [used to describe Owens].” (In response to the *Playboy* interview, Garcia said he didn't have time to answer “such ridiculous, untrue comments.”)

Before the Eagles signed off on the trade with the Ravens and the 49ers, Owens had to convince Reid that he wouldn't be the divisive force he was in San Francisco. Reid is more confrontational than Steve Mariucci, the former Niners coach now with the Detroit Lions, or Mariucci's successor, Dennis Erickson. Because he has more command of the locker room than Garcia had, McNabb won't hesitate to tell Owens to shut up if he starts acting like a prima donna. “T.O.'s got a capo and a consigliere, which he needs—and which I'm not sure he had in San Francisco the last few years,” says Young, the former 49ers quarterback.

Another thing Owens will have to do is start accepting responsibility for his mistakes, such as the dropped balls. Owens can always come up with an excuse, as he did when the subject came up during the dorm interview. “I know why I was dropping them,” he said. “I was trying to do too much, trying to make up for everyone else's weaknesses. There were times I did get frustrated, and my concentration was off. You bring up the dropped balls, but what about the bad reads by the quarterback? Nobody keeps stats on bad quarterback reads.”

“They do here,” McNabb said, without missing a beat. “Welcome to Philly.”

If the wideout can learn anything from the quarterback about playing in the City of Brotherly Love, it's that you have to have a sense of humor along with thick skin. From 2000 through '02 McNabb led the Eagles to 11, 11 and 12 wins, respectively, yet in the course of a second consecutive home loss to open 2003, he was booed lustily at Lincoln Financial Field by fans who then started calling for backup A.J. Feeley. Instead of firing back at the crowd in postgame interviews, McNabb accepted responsibility, saying that he had to play better. Says Owens, “I know I have to get tough, I have to get grimy, to play here.”

McNabb has almost as much at stake in this partnership as Owens does. The last two NFC title game losses have come in Philadelphia, and in those defeats (27–10 to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2002 and 14–3 to the Carolina Panthers in '03) the offense was awful. In 22 possessions McNabb mustered one touchdown drive (26 yards) and threw four interceptions. It's little wonder, then, that even the low-key quarterback at least gets a little pumped when talking about playing with Owens.

“Not to take anything away from the guys we've had here,” McNabb says, “but I think an offense has to have a go-to guy.

I've done just about everything a quarterback can do. My winning percentage is up there. But I've never gotten [included] in the *great quarterback* [discussion]. Why is that? Peyton Manning has Marvin Harrison. Kurt Warner had Isaac Bruce. I had one guy, but that was back in college, when I had Marvin at Syracuse. It's exciting, the anticipation of playing with T.O.”

The two have already discussed ways to celebrate touchdowns, but those plans remain under wraps for now. “We have a list,” McNabb says.

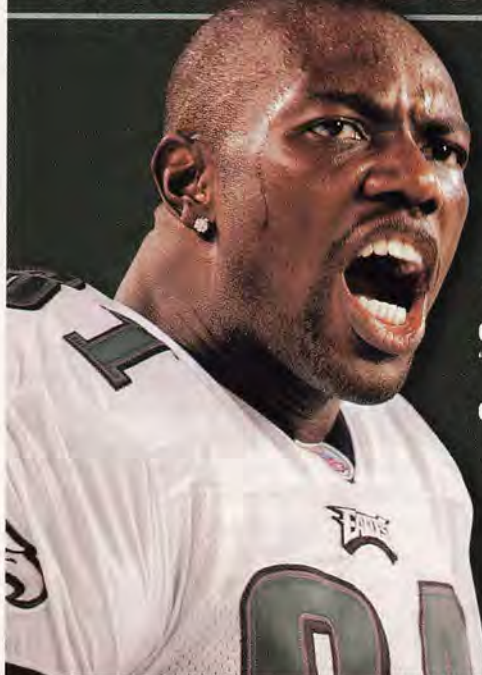
Ever looking to defend his past actions, Owens says he wasn't trying to be selfish when he notoriously celebrated TDs as a 49er. He insists he was simply reveling in the moment when he danced on the Dallas Cowboys' star at midfield of Texas Stadium in 2001; likewise when he pulled the marker out of his sock and signed the ball after scoring against the Seattle Seahawks. “Dude, do you know how hard we work?” he says. “We work our butts off to get to the end zone. I've never done an obscene gesture. People loved the Ikey Shuffle when Ikey Woods did it [in 1988]. Why wasn't that a *me* thing?”

After a pause, he says, “What I'm saying is, Why can't I be different?”

You *can* be T.O., if you help bring long-suffering Eagles fans a Super Bowl win. □

T.O. SOUNDS OFF

The outspoken wide receiver has an opinion on everything. All you have to do is get him started



On his eight seasons in San Francisco:

“I feel I have a lot of talent that was underutilized. Maybe I did get cocky, but from the day I got there, everybody told me, ‘Pattern yourself after Jerry [Rice]. Pattern yourself after Jerry.’ I heard it from the coach, the assistant coaches, the front office. ‘Pattern yourself after Jerry.’ I did what Jerry did.”

On wanting the limelight:

“I don't have to want it. It comes to me.”

On his constant criticism of quarterback Jeff Garcia, a former teammate:

“People listen to me and think, ‘Well, he's still bashing Jeff.’ But the fact is there's a difference in arm strength between Jeff and Donovan [McNabb]. Jeff had trouble throwing the deep ball. I enjoy catching deep balls, which I haven't been able to do for the last two or three years.”

On end zone celebrations:

“Why is it that guys are scoring touchdowns and celebrating, and all of a sudden everybody's saying it's a me, me, me thing? Guys have celebrated for years. And the NFL wants us to have a team concept, yet if you celebrate with a teammate, it's a flag.”

On the amount of money he earns to play professional football:

“They pay me a lot. It ain't enough.”

On being perceived as a look-at-me guy:

“It's not ‘Look at me.’ It's me enjoying the football game. [The media] look at it like it's ‘Look at me.’ And if you've got the media saying he's a selfish guy, the public buys that perception.”

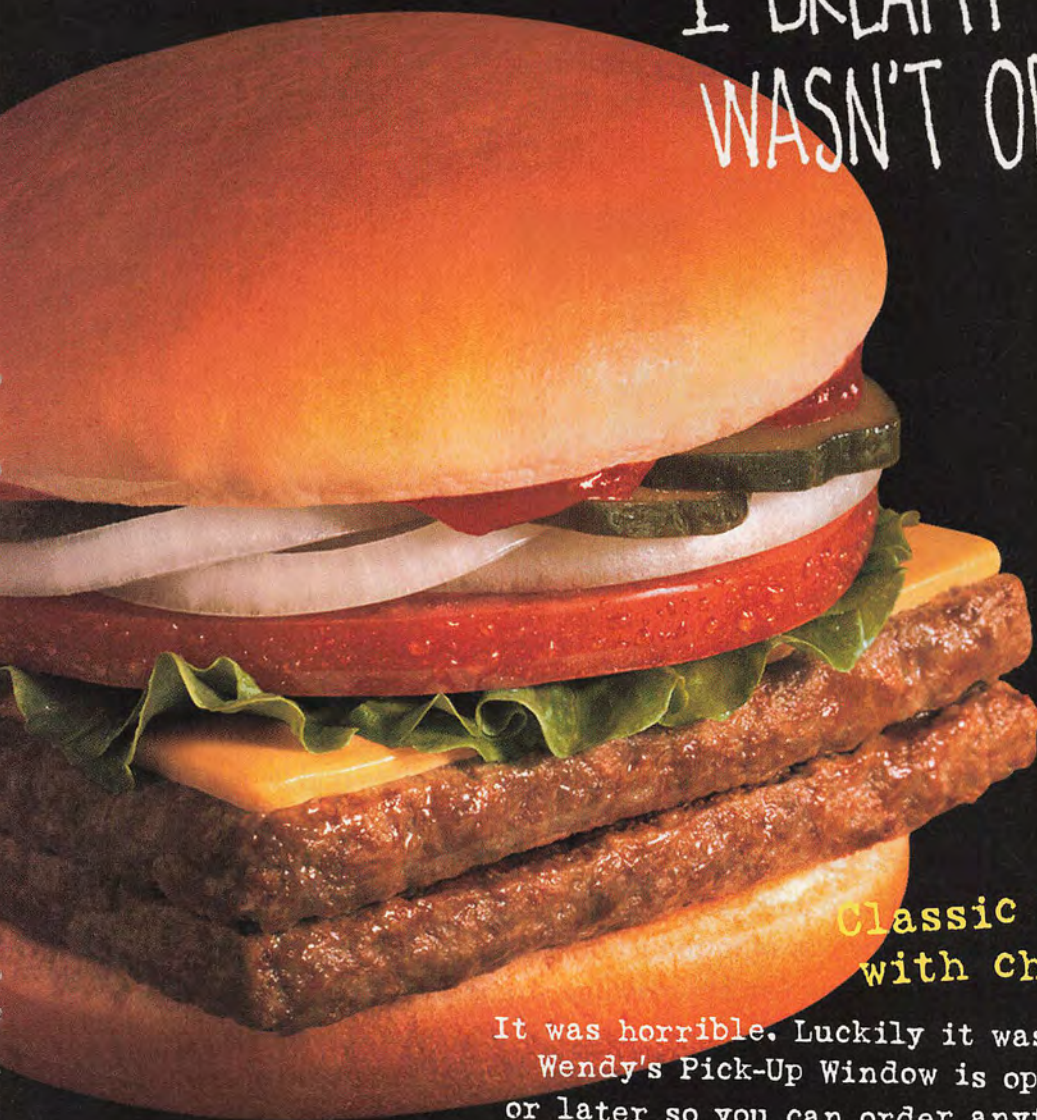
On God's role in his life:

“I am God's child. God don't want to see me fail.”



-Mr. Wendy

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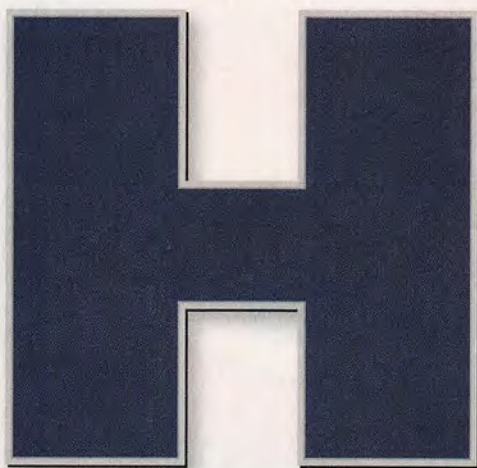


HOW IS HE SO GOOD ON A TEAM SO BAD?

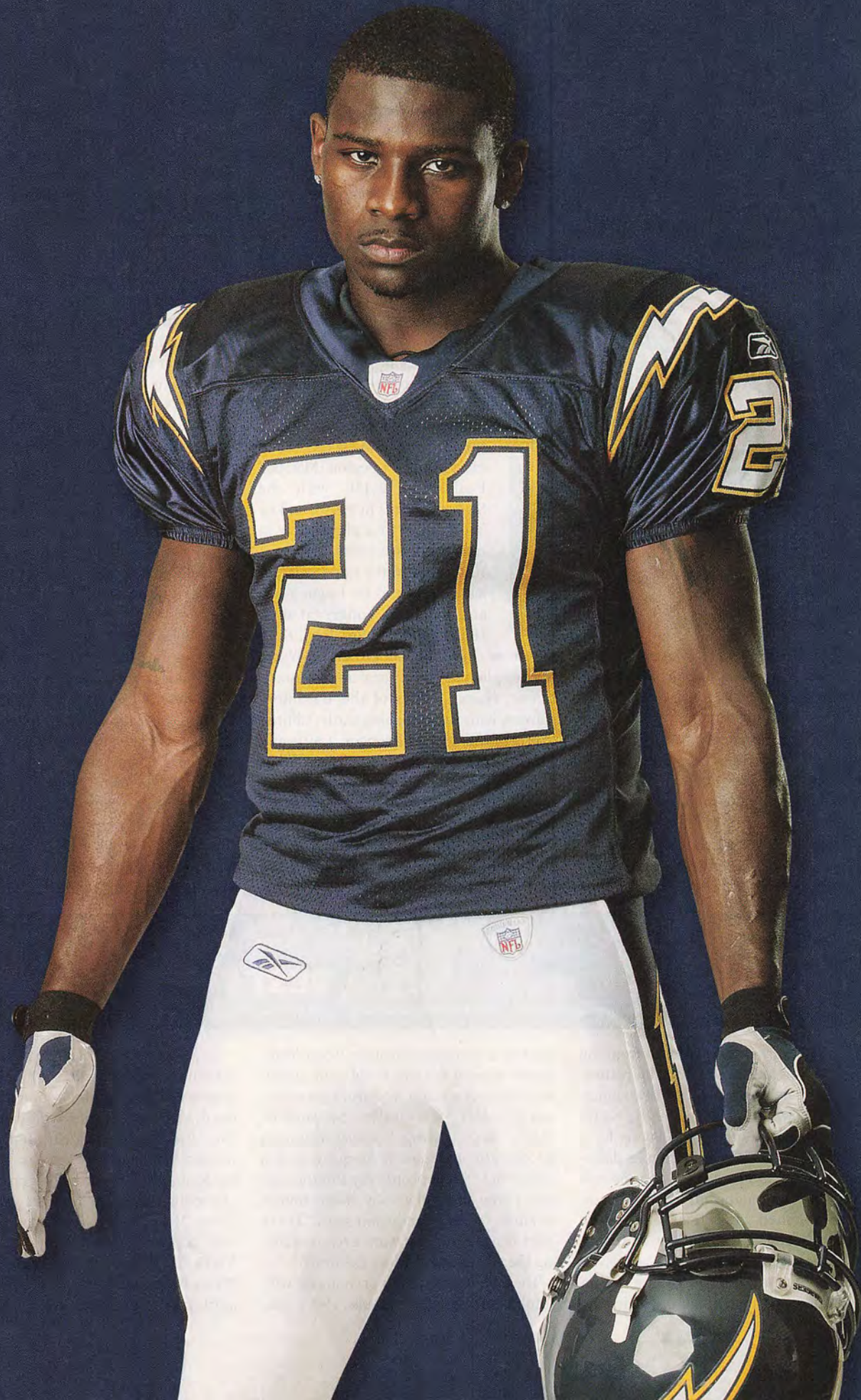
Tough-minded **LADAINIAN TOMLINSON** is the league's highest-paid running back, but he doesn't get his props because he plays for the woeful Chargers

BY MICHAEL SILVER

Photograph by Joey Terrill



HE SWOOPS IN WITHOUT warning, arriving as suddenly as a lightning bolt from the heavens, and LaDainian Tomlinson doesn't stand a chance of escaping. The San Diego Chargers running back isn't used to being caught from behind by anyone, especially a middle-aged man decked out in a yellow blazer, navy slacks, blue Oxford shirt and official Chargers necktie, a man who on this July afternoon has jumped out of his shiny black Bentley and into Tomlinson's path a few steps from the entrance to a restaurant. "Joey Langlois," the man says by way of introduction. He vigorously shakes Tomlinson's hand, then suspiciously eyes an approaching stranger who's clutching a pen and notepad. "Are you *with* him," Langlois asks, nodding toward Tomlinson, "or trying to get *at* him?" ¶ Tomlinson's new pal Joey isn't so much anxious as needy. That's the way all Chargers fans are when it comes to the player known as LT. Mindful that their lovely coastal city has turned into an NFL wasteland, they cling to Tomlinson like a bunch of NBC executives clustered around Donald Trump at the wrap party for *The Apprentice*. "You're not going to leave us, are you?"





SNUBBED Tomlinson's 1,000 rushing yards and 100 catches in 2003 was an NFL first, but he still didn't make it to the Pro Bowl.

Langlois says nervously. "We really love you here, and things are going to turn around, so keep the faith." Langlois reaches into his pocket and pulls out his wallet, proudly producing a Visa card bearing the Chargers' logo. "I've had it since '95," he says, "right after the Super Bowl season."

Smiling, Tomlinson checks out the plas-

in a fantasy football league, you probably have no idea how scary good this 25-year-old runner is. "He's a combination of Walter Payton and Barry Sanders," says Chargers coach Marty Schottenheimer, a 28-year NFL veteran who turns 61 this month. "For a time I said he was one of the best backs I'd seen, but two thirds of the way through last season I took the caveat out. He's the best I've seen, period."

Last season, while San Diego staggered to a 4-12 record, Tomlinson accounted for 46% of the team's offense. His 2,370 yards from scrimmage were the second most in an NFL season (Marshall Faulk had 2,430 with the St. Louis Rams in 1999), and he became the first player ever to rush for 1,000 yards and catch 100 passes in the same year. Yet last February, as the league's best and brightest congregated in Honolulu for the Pro Bowl, Tom-

linson was in his hometown of Waco, Texas, playing dominoes at his aunt's house. (Jamal Lewis of the Baltimore Ravens, with 2,066 rushing yards; Clinton Portis of the Denver Broncos, 1,591; and Priest Holmes of the Kansas City Chiefs, 1,420, were the running backs voted by their peers, the coaches and the fans to play for the AFC.)

Given the Chargers' four national-TV appearances in the last three years and their extended run of futility (San Diego

sionate man who moves through life grinning, a homebody who'd rather turn in early than get love up in the club. "He says, 'It's too loud, too hot and so packed you can't even walk around, so why go?'" says his wife, LaTorsha. "But I like to dance, so sometimes he gets dragged out." He is constantly chided—"Man, you should've come"—by friends and teammates who have returned from events such as the NBA All-Star Game and the Super Bowl. The reasons for his absence from the NFL title game go deeper than his aversion to socializing at big events. "Honestly, I've been running from questions like, 'So what's going on with the Chargers?'" he says, "because I don't have any answers."

If it sounds as if Tomlinson might unload on his organization, don't be fooled: It's not his style. "Sometimes it's tempting to tell [management] my opinion," he says. "But in the long run, it's really not up to the players to give their input." Last November he bit his lip when the Chargers benched his friend, quarterback Drew Brees, and replaced him with veteran Doug Flutie for six games. Tomlinson may have been frustrated about the predictability of the offense—as fullback Lorenzo Neal says, "Guys on defense were calling out plays before we ran them, putting nine guys in the box"—and the lack of receiving threats. If so, LT kept it on the Q.T., and stayed loyal to the exacting Schottenheimer. To borrow from rapper Jay-Z, he's got 99 problems but a coach ain't one. "Everybody close to me took the Pro Bowl thing pretty hard," Tomlinson says, "but Marty might've taken it the hardest. Man, was he pissed when he found out."

"For a time I said he was one of the best backs I'd seen, but last season I took the caveat out. He's the **BEST I'VE SEEN**, period."

tic, then politely excuses himself from the conversation and heads into the restaurant, where he'll spend the next two hours explaining what it's like to be the NFL's least appreciated superstar. Playing for a franchise that's still reeling from its disastrous 1998 predraft trade for quarterback Ryan Leaf, the tough-minded Tomlinson has established himself as one of the league's best players despite enduring 31 losses in the 48 games since he arrived in 2001. But unless you live in a region where fish tacos are popular or participate

last had a winning season in 1995), Tomlinson viewed the Pro Bowl snub philosophically: *If a player for a team at the bottom of the AFC West runs for 1,645 yards on 313 carries (5.3 average), catches 100 passes for 725 yards and scores 17 touchdowns, does it happen?* "Some people say I'm the best back in the NFL, others say Priest Holmes or Jamal Lewis," Tomlinson says. "That's what drives you: You want everyone saying there's no doubt who's the best."

The bold words are out of character with Tomlinson's agreeable nature. He's a pas-

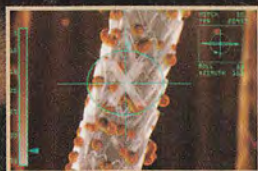
As if the snub and the indignity of a 4-12 season weren't enough, the Chargers experienced the sting of rejection just before the draft in April, when word leaked that Ole Miss quarterback Eli Manning had warned San Diego not to select him with the No. 1 pick because he had no intention of playing there. The Chargers ultimately chose Manning and traded him to the New York Giants for the fourth selection, North Carolina State quarterback Philip Rivers (who didn't agree to contract terms until Aug. 23). As he monitored the Man-



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2004 NFL PREVIEW TOMLINSON

ning saga, Tomlinson, like many fans, thought, *Shoot, don't draft him. If he doesn't want to be here, who needs him?*

"I'm kind of an old-school guy," Tomlinson says, "and the way the league is set up, the draft is designed to help the worst teams. It's not right when someone pulls something like that. Just to be drafted is a dream come true. Don't walk around acting like, My father was this; my brother is this, so I've got the power. It's kind of sad. I mean, is he going to come in as a rookie and be Dan Marino? Probably not. I don't see him being as good as his brother."

Tomlinson's mental toughness is based largely on personal experience. "I've been dealing with being overlooked my whole life," he says, noting that he played fullback until his senior year at Waco University High, then finally got his shot as the featured ballcarrier and excelled. By then many of the region's prominent schools had homed in on other tailbacks, so Tomlinson went to TCU in Fort Worth, where in his sophomore season new coach Dennis Franchione moved him from starting halfback to starting fullback to backup halfback. Given another chance to shine as a junior, Tomlinson led the nation in rushing with 1,850 yards in 11 games, including a Division I-A record 406 yards against Texas-El Paso.

He considered declaring for the 2000 draft until learning that scouting services had projected him to be a third- or fourth-round pick. Printouts of those unflattering reports went up on the wall of Tomlinson's condominium during his senior season, when he again gained more yards than any other Division I-A runner (2,158) and then finished fourth in the Heisman Trophy voting. Also that year he met LaTorsha, winning her heart with the mushy cards he left in her dorm room and, when she'd answer his calls, the sappy songs he played into the phone's mouthpiece. "Most guys are afraid to talk about their feelings, but he's very affectionate and genuine," LaTorsha says. "He's so nonchalant about adversity; I don't think he can get mad."



DETERMINED Tomlinson wants to be part of a Chargers' revival, and who needs Eli Manning anyway?

Tomlinson never bristled when, during his first two NFL seasons, he was best known as the Guy Who Got Traded for Michael Vick. (The Chargers dealt the No. 1 pick in the 2001 draft to the Atlanta Falcons, who selected Vick, then took Tomlinson with the fifth choice.) He rushed for a total of 2,919 yards those two years, but Vick had a breakout season in '02, leading the Falcons to an upset of the Green Bay

Packers in an NFC wild-card game. Says Tomlinson, "The way I look at it is, if Michael Vick and I both become Hall of Famers, everyone should be happy."

Assuming his body holds up, the 5' 10", 221-pound Tomlinson is on his way to Canton. With his quick burst, exceptional vision, unearthly cutback ability and aptitude for juking and shedding tacklers, he strikes fear into the hearts of defenders every time he touches the ball. Citing two of his electrifying teammates, Chiefs safety Jerome

Woods says Tomlinson is "like Dante Hall and Priest Holmes rolled into one. It's unbelievable to say that about a back, but that's the truth. When he gets the ball in his hands, you're always thinking, Get him inside to the help." Then, referring to the *SportsCenter* theme, Woods adds, "If you don't get help, it's da-da-da, da-da-da."

It's likely that opposing defenders will continue to face the music in 2004, but his teammates hope that Tomlinson's highlight-reel runs can also fuel a San Diego surge into playoff contention. "We need to win," says Neal, "because the world needs to see this superstar and put him on the platform he deserves, instead of saying, Who's LaDainian Tomlinson?"

The world got a better idea on Aug. 14, when Tomlinson signed an extension—eight years, \$60 million, including a \$12.4 million signing bonus—that made him the highest-paid running back in the NFL. "I would love to spend my whole career in San Diego because I accept the challenge of turning this team around," Tomlinson says. "I don't think there's a person who thinks we have a chance. But I do."

ROBERT BECK



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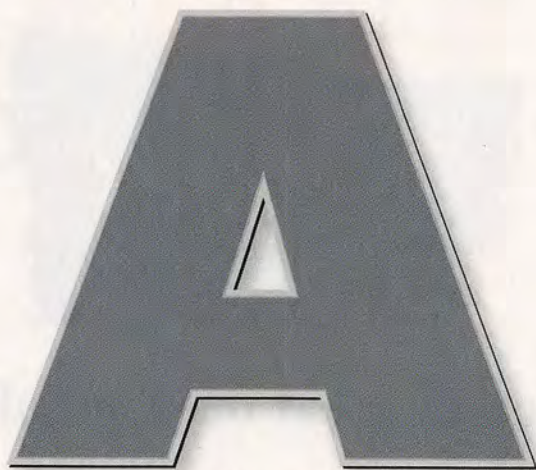


DID I REALLY SAY WHAT I JUST SAID?

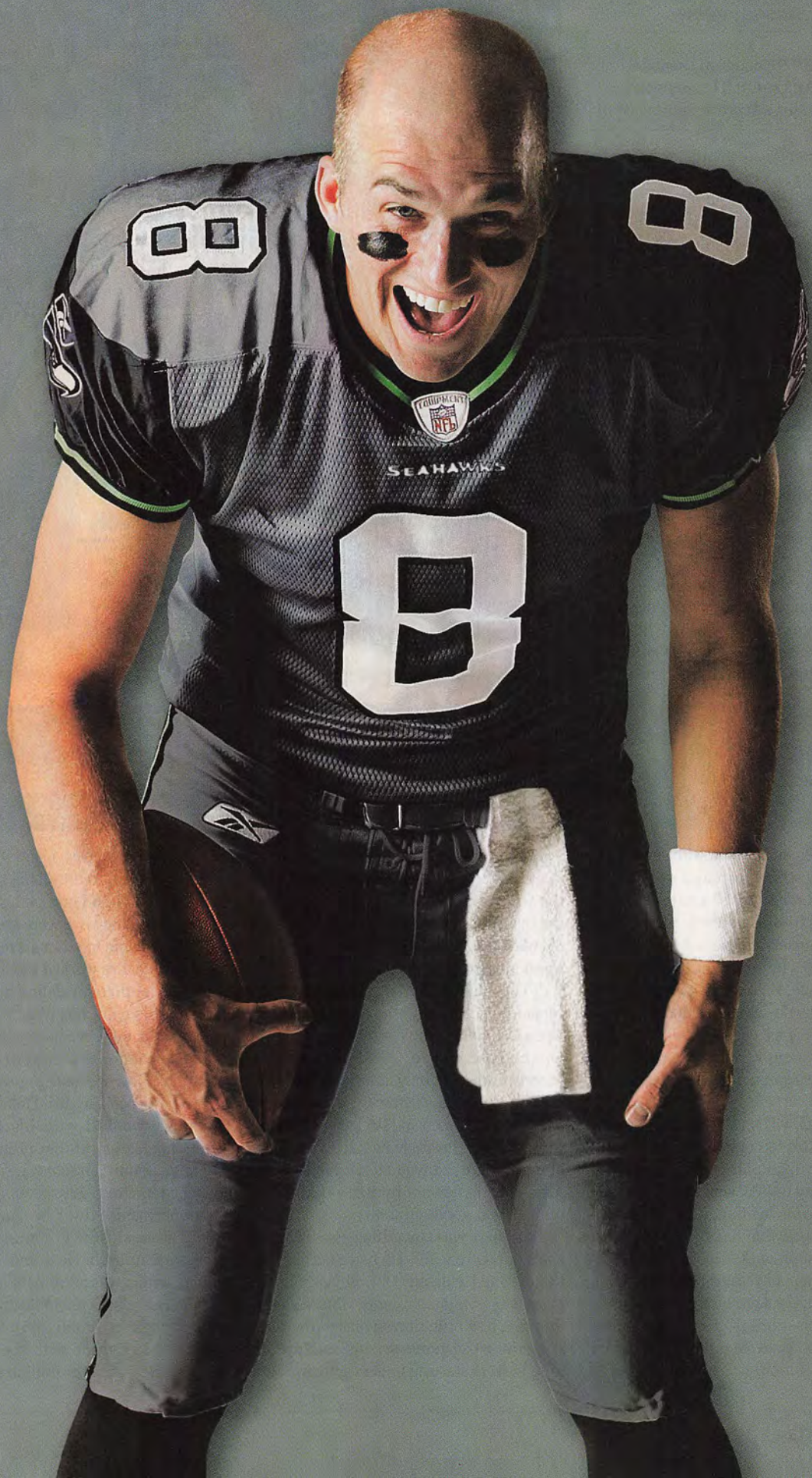
Tough-talking **MATT HASSELBECK** may be best known for a bold prediction gone awry, but he has also emerged as one of the game's top quarterbacks

BY JOSH ELLIOTT

Photograph by Joey Terrill



AS THE COIN HUNG in the frigid air at Lambeau Field last January, Matt Hasselbeck stood a 50-50 chance of remaining just another faceless Seattle Seahawk. If the coin landed on tails, he would have to watch his former teammate and mentor, Green Bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre, get first crack at winning in overtime of their NFC wild-card playoff game. Tails, and Hasselbeck might miss the chance to extend his breakthrough 2003 season. Tails, and he might not get what he desperately wanted—the ball, and Seattle's fate, in his hands. ¶ That's why, after the coin came up heads, Hasselbeck was nearly bursting with joy when referee Bernie Kukar looked to him and asked if Seattle wanted to kick off or receive. After a bumpy start in Seattle that included being benched in 2001, here was his chance to show he was playoff-worthy. Hasselbeck leaned toward Kukar, whose field microphone was on, and broke the news to his coaches, his teammates, 71,457 Cheeseheads at Lambeau and millions watching on national television. "We want the ball," Hasselbeck said, "and we're going to score." ¶ As he ran back to the sideline, Hasselbeck heard the agitated murmur

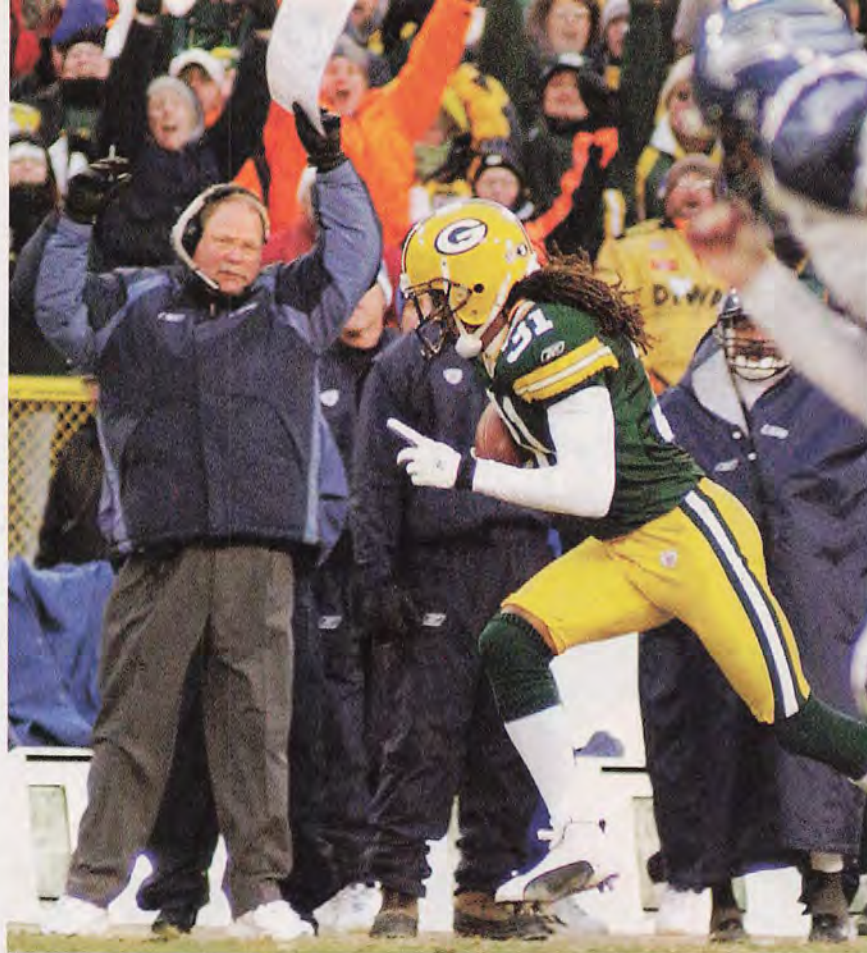


OVER AND OUT Holmgren (headset) had to watch Harris return Hasselbeck's ill-timed pass for a score in sudden death.

coursing through the stands, the Packers faithful asking, *Did he just say that?* Hasselbeck smiled. *Damn right I did.*

He had already completed 22 of 38 passes for 285 yards in regulation, leading the Seahawks on a 67-yard touchdown drive to tie the score at 27 with less than a minute to play. But none of that mattered when—after the teams had exchanged punts in overtime—Green Bay cornerback Al Harris jumped the route of wideout Alex Bannister in the left flat, intercepted Hasselbeck's pass and returned it 52 yards for a touchdown. In the locker room afterward, Hasselbeck was ashen, mortified that his tough talk had backfired. Asked which of his nagging injuries hurt the worst, Hasselbeck didn't miss a beat. "My feelings," he replied, tough as Jell-O.

So what if he'd thrown for a team-record 3,841 yards and 26 touchdowns during the regular season; completed 61% of his passes; guided the Seahawks to a 10-6 record; and earned his first trip to the Pro Bowl?



"We've come too far as a team to let one loss ruin us. I've worked too hard, done too much to **LET THAT DAY DEFINE ME.**"

Who would remember that, with smarts and a deceptively strong arm and exceptional mobility, he had reversed a career freefall and evolved into the steady pilot of the NFL's sixth-ranked offense, a fearless leader who had a 107.3 rating on third down (third best in the league)? To the vast majority who had heard Hasselbeck's prediction, but knew little about his best season in six as a pro, the bold statement was nothing more than hollow hubris from a mouthy quarterback.

S EVEN MONTHS later the 28-year-old Hasselbeck lazes in a swivel chair in an office at the Seahawks' practice facility in Bellevue, Wash. He doffs his ball cap, runs his fingers over what remains of the hair that has been disappearing since his sophomore year at Boston College. "I got a haircut yesterday; it was getting out of control," he says, taking a shot at his favorite target—himself. The self-deprecation is an attempt to steer the conversation in another direction; he's not fond of revis-

iting the past. And when he does, his tone is almost indignant. "It kills me to think that the Green Bay organization or the fans or the casual observer took offense," he says of his playoff proclamation. "I never meant to upset anybody or have everybody hear it."

"[The chatter among the teams' co-captains] started before the opening coin toss, when Green Bay sent, like, nine captains out. Lots of those guys are friends of mine, good friends, and so it's only natural to rag," Hasselbeck continued. "Before OT only [running back] Ahman Green and [kicker] Ryan Longwell came out. I was giving it to Ryan, telling him not to miss any game-winners, telling Ahman he better not fumble—that sort of thing. It was good-natured."

"But there was something else this time. I was out there with [defensive tackle] John Randle and [wideout] Darrell Jackson. The place was going crazy, and I found myself thinking of all the times I'd seen the same scenario: close game at Lambeau, the visiting players starting to get tight, and then

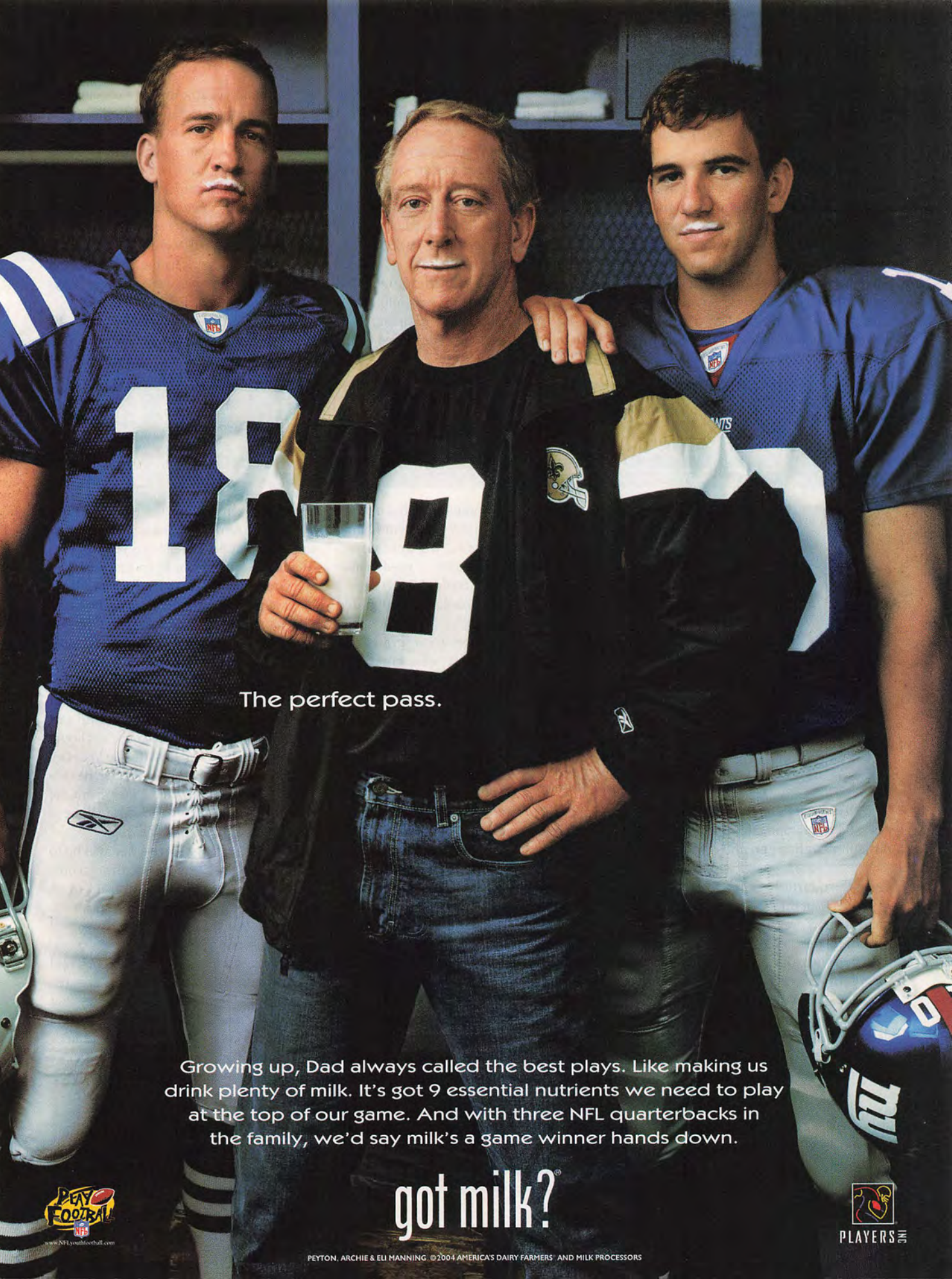
they beat themselves. I said it for John and Darrell to hear, so they'd tell the guys what a crazy thing I had just said, so they would know that I knew we were going to win."

"We've come too far as a team to let one loss ruin us. I've worked too hard, done too much to let that day define me. Every person on this team has lived with that pain for months now. We have a choice: Do we move ahead, or slip away? Last year was no fluke. Now we have to prove it."

Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren is ready to move forward with his quarterback, sounding like a gruff-but-proud papa when he talks about Hasselbeck, whom he first coached in Green Bay in 1998. "It's Matt's team now, and I think he showed that last year," he says. "He's in command of the offense and himself. He doesn't try to do too much, which was a problem in the past."

The Hasselbeck era in Seattle began happily enough in March 2001, when he was acquired in a trade with the Packers. He was handed the starting job and featured

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18

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10

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prominently in the team's marketing campaign—heady stuff for a former sixth-round draft pick who had thrown all of 29 NFL passes as Favre's backup.

Hasselbeck's inexperience quickly surfaced. His swaggering, hyperactive persona irked some teammates, and his excessive on-field freelancing exasperated coaches. "I wouldn't say Matt was making it *all* up, exactly," quarterbacks coach Jim Zorn says, "but . . ." You get the picture. By the time the Seahawks had finished 9–7 and missed the playoffs by a game, the cacophony of boos aimed at Hasselbeck had subsided—but only because Holmgren had

bility. "It was my immaturity and lack of humility," he says. "When I got here, I thought they'd want to hear my thoughts, as [the Packers had] always wanted Brett's. I failed to realize Brett was an exception to the rule. I needed somebody to say, 'You're not in Green Bay anymore.' Somebody probably did, and I just missed it."

Leaving Green Bay for the Pacific Northwest was difficult for Hasselbeck and his wife, Sarah, who gave birth to their first daughter, Annabelle, six weeks into the '01 season. (A second daughter, Mallory, was born in February 2003.) They loved Green Bay's cozy, family-friendly environs; Seat-

professional, what it means to be a teammate. He's why I was able to keep going."

So when Dilfer went down with a torn Achilles in the seventh game of the 2002 season, Hasselbeck returned to the lineup a changed man. "Matt took immediate control of the huddle," center Robbie Tobeck says. "He was totally different." He had also stopped butting heads with Holmgren, whose authority Hasselbeck had finally learned to respect. "Yeah, things were different," says Zorn. "Mike talked, and Matt listened."

"I'd been humbled," Hasselbeck says. "I'd realized that it had been 10 guys on one page, and me on another. I learned to trust

"Trent was **EVERYTHING TO ME**. To call him a crutch or a buffer doesn't do him justice. He's why I was able to keep going."



FRIENDS FIRST Dilfer and Hasselbeck reached out to one another while facing difficult situations on and off the field.

given the quarterback job to Trent Dilfer.

"When Matt came here, I wanted to pump him up, show everybody I believed in him," says Holmgren. "Maybe I overdid all that."

It didn't help that Hasselbeck tried to play the role of veteran gunslinger, at times subconsciously imitating Favre. In unit meetings he offered unsolicited tweaks for plays, drawing the ire of coaches. On the field his manic energy made him difficult to understand in the huddle, and his freelancing confused the young receivers. In the locker room he came off as arrogant and overly chatty. "That first year I thought maybe they could get him some Ritalin," recalls linebacker Chad Brown. "He was just . . . off."

Hasselbeck is quick to accept responsi-

ble's comparatively far-flung geography left them feeling detached. "We were miserable," he says. "I tried to hide it, but I couldn't."

His insolence and gilded excuses for bad reads and poor execution grated on Holmgren, who compared Hasselbeck to the similarly stubborn and cerebral Steve Young. As an assistant with the San Francisco 49ers from 1986 through '91, Holmgren had groomed Young to be Joe Montana's successor. "Mike

would say, 'You're just like Steve, talking about wind speed and ball flight,'" Hasselbeck recalls. In practice and in games he disregarded his progressions. "Matt would say, 'But I feel so confined,'" says Zorn. "and I'd say, 'Great!' That's exactly how we wanted him—confined."

Throughout the difficult transition Hasselbeck leaned heavily on Dilfer, who, having struggled mightily himself with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Baltimore Ravens before winning Super Bowl XXXV, was a perfect sounding board. In addition, Dilfer and his wife, Cassandra, the parents of four young children, helped ease the Hasselbecks' anxiety over their relocation and offered perspective on the mysteries of child rearing. The couples became fast friends. "Trent was everything to me," Hasselbeck says. "To call him a crutch or a buffer doesn't do him justice. He showed me how to be a

that the coaches knew better than I did."

Then, in April 2003, came the devastating news that the Dilfers' five-year-old son, Trevin, had died from heart disease. Hasselbeck ached for Trent, but he was unsure of what to do for him. With training camp approaching, Hasselbeck was stunned again when Dilfer told him he was retiring. Hasselbeck would have none of it. "He convinced me that I was missed and needed by my teammates," Dilfer recalls. "He let me know his Number 1 goal in camp was to support me. He gave up countless hours of sleep helping me deal with the loss. Despite all the pressure he was under, he sacrificed to be there for me." Dilfer spent the season as Hasselbeck's backup, a job he is expected to fill again this year.

Meanwhile, Hasselbeck's role will be to help the Seahawks get back to the playoffs. Those who recognize him around town salute him for his proclamation. In fact Hasselbeck has been criticized by only one person for his infamous statement; in a meeting two weeks after the loss, the coach told his quarterback he was not happy about the stunt and never to say something like that again. Whereas in the past he might have pleaded his case, Hasselbeck instead nodded his head and quietly took his leave.

After recounting the events on that wintry day in Green Bay, Hasselbeck turns in the swivel chair and stares out a window. Then he swings back to make one last point. "Deep down," he says, dropping his voice to a whisper so that no one else can hear, "I think Mike liked that I said it." □

OTTO GREUL JR./GETTY IMAGES

BIGGER ARMS IN JUST ONE DAY.



DR. Z's ALL-T

When it comes to players with grit, here's the lineup Paul Zimmerman wants on his situational pass rushers here or wide receivers who won't block or cornerbacks

DEFENSE



E
KIMO VON OELHOFFEN
Steelers

I've loved his rugged style ever since he was eating up blockers with the Bengals in the late '90s. Now he's one of the mainstays of Pittsburgh's 3-4, freeing linebacker Joey Porter to rush from the outside.



T
JEFF ZGONINA
Dolphins

Need someone to stop the running game? Here's your guy. Over his 11-year career, Zgonina has done it for six teams, most recently Miami. He feels lonely when he doesn't get double-teamed.



T
KELLY GREGG
Ravens

A player with a nonstop motor, he lines up on the nose in the 3-4. His job last season was to keep blockers off linebacker Ray Lewis, but Gregg still finished fourth on the team in tackles.



E
PATRICK KERNEY
Falcons

Not the biggest end in the world at 273 pounds, he still mans the power side, meaning he spends the game fighting the double team. In five years Kerney has never missed a game, playing in 80 straight.



OLB
JOEY PORTER
Steelers

He makes his reputation as a pass rusher, but he's tough at the point, too, and here's what impressed me: Three weeks after being accidentally shot in the upper thigh last September, he was back on the field.



OLB
MIKE VRABEL
Patriots

Want him to be a linebacker? He'll line up on the strong side and drop into coverage. Want him to be an end? He'll mix it up with a tackle. He's the perfect situational player in an ever-changing system.



MLB
RAY LEWIS
Ravens

He's tough and lets everyone know it, which might be grounds for disqualification from this team. But when Lewis is ranting and raving, his teammates don't cover their ears. They seem to take heart.



CB
ANTOINE WINFIELD
Vikings

So he's a little guy (5' 9", 180 pounds), but will any other corner play the force and give up his body the way Winfield does? He's the only corner in the league who's genuinely feared for his hitting.



CB
FRED THOMAS
Saints

A couple of years ago he played with a soft cast on his hand, running around and knocking down passes with that thing. A former teammate, Sammy Knight, told me Thomas was the toughest guy on the team.



S
DARREN WOODSON
Cowboys

There are plenty to choose from, but Woodson is the pick because he has been doing it for 12 years. Last season he covered punts and kickoffs, too—at 34. I asked him about it. "I volunteered," he said.



FS
BRIAN DAWKINS
Eagles

There's a lot of sentiment for the Cowboys' Roy Williams, but this is an easy choice. Dawkins is a wild man on the blitz, and he'll close quickly on a receiver and deliver a blow with the best of them.

very defensive coach looks for a guy
someone who will light up your
ole team. Believe me, they're rare.”

DONNIE HENDERSON, Jets defensive coordinator, on Ray Lewis

TOUGH TEAM

side—22 lunch-pailers who play hurt and never take a down off. You won't find who don't hit. Just a bunch of guys taking pride in doing the dirty work

OFFENSE



T
KYLE TURLEY
Rams

The former Saints bad boy has settled down, and last year he gave the Rams something they lacked: a mauler at right tackle. Mess with one of his teammates and Turley is still the first to jump in.



G
MIKE WAHLE
Packers

This seven-year veteran out of Navy is tough to separate from Green Bay's other guard, Marco Rivera, but Wahle keys a power running game that has been one of the league's best for years.



C
HANK FRALEY
Eagles

Not what you'd call a form blocker, he'll claw and scratch and get the job done any way he can. Originally signed as a free agent by the Steelers, he has become a fixture in Philly, starting 47 of 48 games.



G
JOE ANDRUZZI
Patriots

"One of the toughest people, mentally and physically, that I've ever been around," says Scott Pioli, New England's player personnel director. Andruzzi powers the running game and plays when he's hurt.



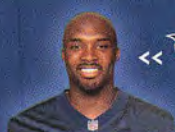
T
DERRICK DEESE
Buccaneers

The smallest starting tackle in the NFL at 6'3", 289 pounds, this former 49er battles pass rushers to the final whistle. Injuries have slowed the 13-year veteran, but he can fire up an offensive line.



TE
JASON DUNN
Chiefs

He's the in-line blocker when K.C.'s in a two-tight-end set, and few in the NFL are better at it. The tackles get a lot of credit for Priest Holmes's yards to the outside, but Dunn creates the soft corner.



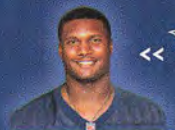
WR
DERRICK MASON
Titans

Fearless over the middle, sure-handed in traffic, he's been Steve McNair's go-to wideout for four years. Last season Mason caught a career-high 95 passes and also returned a few punts and kickoffs.



WR
HINES WARD
Steelers

He had 301 receptions over the last three seasons but is most feared and respected for his aggressiveness. No one finishes a play as well as Ward does, and he'll block anything with a heartbeat.



QB
STEVE MCNAIR
Titans

He considers it a bonus when he can practice for a full week. McNair dislocated a finger early last season and was playing with a strained calf muscle and a cracked bone spur in his ankle at the end of '03.



RB
EDDIE GEORGE
Cowboys

He started 111 straight games for the Titans despite an endless string of injuries, and in last season's wild-card win over the Ravens, he dislocated his shoulder but still had 88 yards on 25 carries.

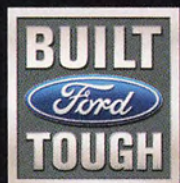


FB
CORY SCHLESINGER
Lions

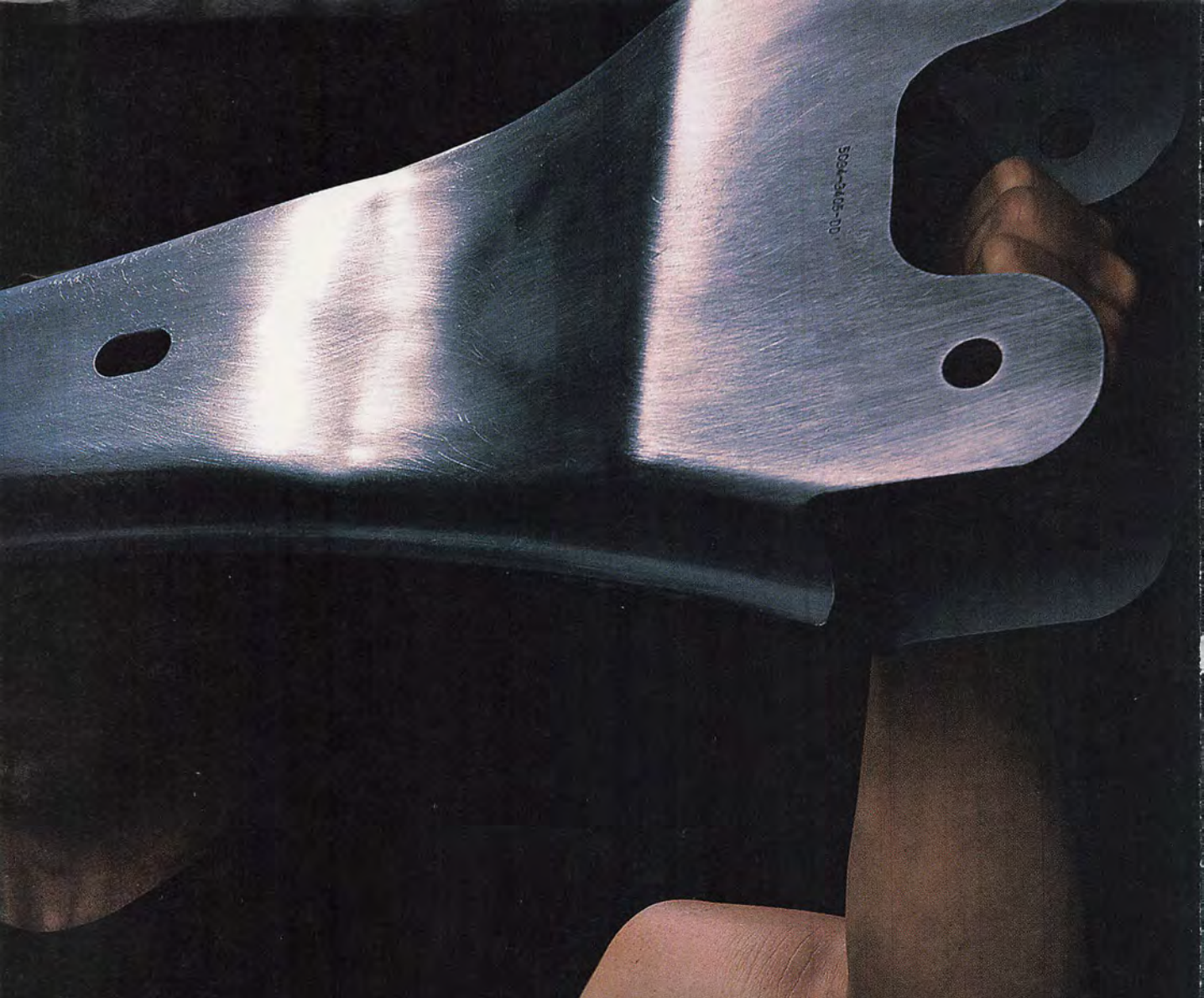
All fullbacks are tough, but in a game against the Bears in 2002 he played with a cracked bone in his back. He took on Brian Urlacher, and his blocking set up James Stewart for a 172-yard rushing day.

“Do you have any idea how tough he is to take the punishment he does? You give him everything, but he's still standing.”

JEROME BETTIS, Steelers running back

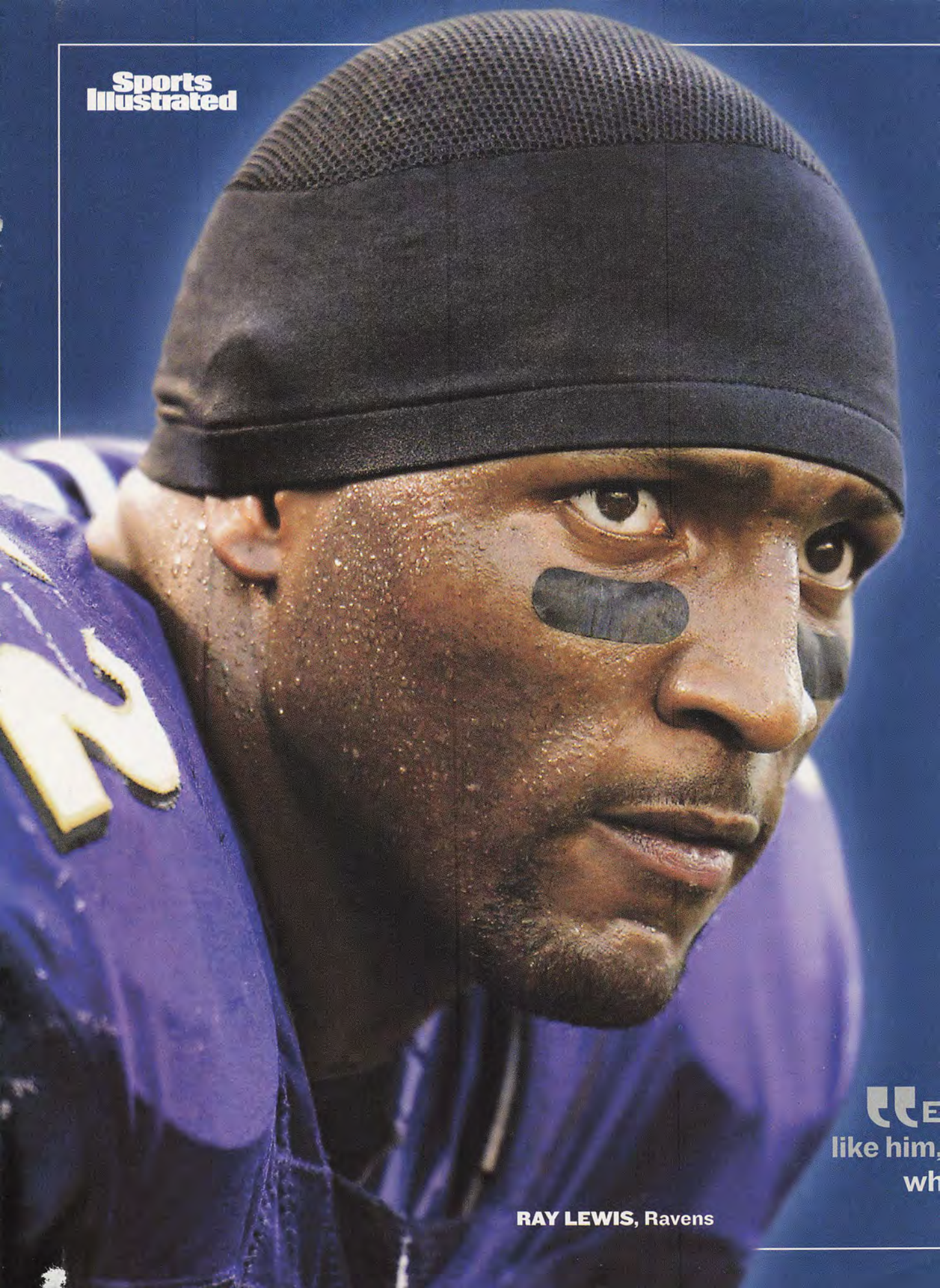


THE NEXT SUPER DUTY



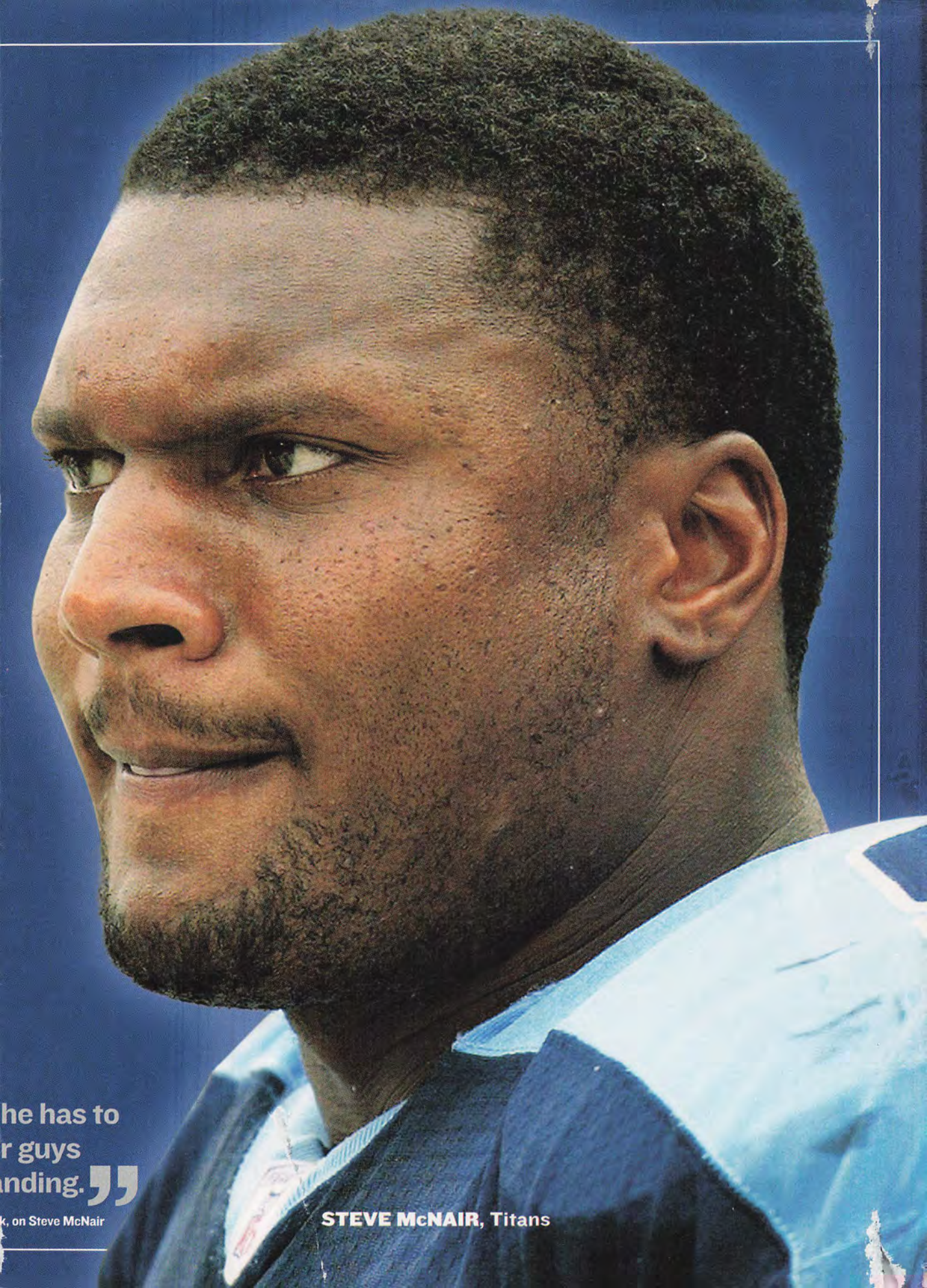
Radius arms, that is. Two of them. Each one more than 39" long, 11" tall, 3.5" thick. Over 29 lbs. Connected to the all-new 4x4 suspension. Provides a confident ride. Improves maneuverability under colossal payloads. Controlling bigger tow loads. Don't you wish you had guns like these? Fordvehicles.com.

**Sports
Illustrated**



RAY LEWIS, Ravens

LE
like him,
wh



he has to
r guys
nding.”

k, on Steve McNair

STEVE McNAIR, Titans

MOST THINGS WITH THIS MUCH POWER HAVE BEEN OVERTHROWN.

6.0-liter Power Stroke® Turbo Diesel. Variable response. Improved. More powerful. Unsurpassed 325 horsepower. 570 lb.-ft. of torque. For the most pulling power. Longest lasting diesel*. All hail the king. Fordvehicles.com.



THE NEXT SUPER DUTY



*Based on vehicles in operation '94-CYTD 6/04.

SCOUTING REPORTS

DR. Z's POWER RANKINGS

1 Patriots	12 Packers	23 Bears
2 Seahawks	13 Jets	24 Giants
3 Titans	14 Bengals	25 Cowboys
4 Panthers	15 Jaguars	26 Bucs
5 Rams	16 Lions	27 Texans
6 Chiefs	17 Steelers	28 Raiders
7 Eagles	18 Falcons	29 Browns
8 Ravens	19 Bills	30 49ers
9 Vikings	20 Redskins	31 Cardinals
10 Colts	21 Dolphins	32 Chargers
11 Broncos	22 Saints	

HOW THEY'LL FINISH

AFC EAST PROJECTED RECORD

Patriots (1)	13-3
Jets (13)	9-7
Bills (19)	8-8
Dolphins (21)	6-10

AFC NORTH

Ravens (8)	11-5
Bengals (14)	9-7
Steelers (17)	8-8
Browns (29)	5-11

AFC SOUTH

Titans (3)	11-5
Colts* (10)	9-7
Jaguars (15)	8-8
Texans (27)	5-11

AFC WEST

Chiefs (6)	11-5
Broncos* (11)	10-6
Raiders (28)	5-11
Chargers (32)	3-13

NFC EAST

Eagles (7)	10-6
Redskins (20)	8-8
Giants (24)	7-9
Cowboys (25)	6-10

NFC NORTH

Vikings (9)	10-6
Packers* (12)	9-7
Lions (16)	8-8
Bears (23)	6-10

NFC SOUTH

Panthers (4)	10-6
Falcons (18)	8-8
Saints (22)	7-9
Bucs (26)	5-11

NFC WEST

Seahawks (2)	12-4
Rams* (5)	11-5
49ers (30)	4-12
Cardinals (31)	4-12

Overall rank in parentheses *Wild-card team

WILD-CARD PLAYOFFS

AFC Chiefs over Colts, Ravens over Broncos
NFC Panthers over Packers, Vikings over Rams

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

AFC Patriots over Ravens, Chiefs over Titans
NFC Seahawks over Vikings, Panthers over Eagles

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

AFC Patriots over Chiefs **NFC** Seahawks over Panthers

SUPER BOWL XXXIX

Patriots 27, Seahawks 17

STILL SUPER
 Looking as strong as ever, wideout David Givens and the Patriots are the pick to win their third NFL title in four years.

1 NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

The Super Bowl champs aren't standing pat—they've added youngsters to an aging defense and a marquee running back to the mix on offense

A DYNASTY, according to *Webster's*, second edition, is "the continued lordship of a race of rulers."

Some high and mighty terms. The Packers of the 1960s, the Steelers of the '70s—now those were dynasties. How about the Patriots, who have won two Super Bowls in the last three years? Are they dynasty material?

One more NFL title or a continued run of Super Bowl appearances might swing it. And this is precisely the kind of talk that brings a look of disgust to the face of coach Bill Belichick. "It's a bunch of bull," he says. "It's how we play that matters. I don't care what everybody else believes—as long as we don't believe it."

He posted signs around the team's training complex that read, DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE! And beneath that headline is the wreckage of the five Super Bowl teams

from 2000 through '02—Giants, Rams, Patriots, Raiders and Bucs—that crashed the season following their title-game appearance.

That's right, in 2002, one year after winning the Super Bowl, New England was out of the playoffs (9-7)—sunk by the same things that ended the dynasties: Starters got old, stars lost their shine. An overhaul was delayed. How can you cut the guys who bled for you, who did everything to bring you a title? "We tried to hang on with what we had," Belichick says, "and we didn't make it."

A weird imbalance had formed on the team. The offense was young, but the defense was aging. When the Patriots put their faster defenders on the field, teams muscled them and ran on them. When the Pats bulked up with bigger guys, they couldn't catch anybody. So after the 2002 season the defense was overhauled. Four of the first five '03 draft choices were used on defensive players. The top two free-agent imports were pass-rushing line-

backer Roosevelt Colvin and safety Rodney Harrison.

Last year, for the first time in Belichick's four years with the team, New England finished in the top half of the league in defense, ranking seventh. And for the first time in the 44-year history

UPGRADE Dillon, who once held the NFL single-game rushing record (278 yards), has a 4.3-yards-per-carry career average.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> He made news in June when he left his Super Bowl ring in a bathroom at a Providence mall. (A Good Samaritan returned it.) Now **TULLY BANTA-CAIN**, a 2003 seventh-round pick, can make a name for himself as a combination linebacker-defensive end. "He's got the talent," says coach Bill Belichick. "It's just a matter of learning the system."

DREW HOLLOWELL/WIREIMAGE.COM



ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

of the franchise, the team allowed the fewest points in the league. The Patriots won their second Super Bowl, but they're still rebuilding. Again, four of the first five selections in the April draft were defenders, including first-round pick Vince Wilfork, a nosetackle out of Miami. What Belichick is left with now is a unique collection of role players, very intelligent—you must be in order to grasp his system—and tremendously talented.

But this time New England made a dramatic change on the other side of the ball as well. Corey Dillon, the former feature back in Cincinnati who was acquired in an April trade, joins an offense without superstars, just super-clutch performers such as quarterback Tom Brady, who is 6-0 in post-season play and 7-0 in overtime games. Brady has never finished higher than sixth in the NFL passer ratings, but he's the kind of player who raises his game to another level when the stakes are the highest.

"He's like Joe Montana," says former Bills nosetackle Freddy Smerlas, who spent a year with Montana in San Francisco. "In the seven-on-seven drill Brady's very average. But send in two unblocked guys and the whole thing changes. I watched Montana, and as soon as the pressure rose, he just homed in. Brady's the same way."

This is Brady's team, no question. The short-pass offense is geared to his talents, and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis's game plans are almost impossible to prepare for. "You can watch tape of his offense all week," Dolphins Pro Bowl middle linebacker Zach Thomas says, "and then you can throw it out, because Charlie will never give you the same thing twice in a row."

Now Weis has the added benefit of the 29-year-old Dillon, an elusive back who can run with power and toughness. Dillon, who in seven seasons as a Bengal piled up 8,061 yards on the ground, gives the Patriots a dimension they've lacked since Curtis Martin departed before the 1998 season. It's almost an embarrassment of riches. Granted you don't often see offensive-minded coaches who have made their reputation with the pass switching gears and going heavy with the ground game, but Joe Gibbs did it and so did Norv Turner.

So the defending champs, on the verge of a dynasty, have gotten younger and more talented. Are they still hungry? Belichick will get his answer soon enough.

—Paul Zimmerman

Corey Dillon has been a whiner and complainer his whole career. Now he's a model citizen. But his contract includes some yardage incentives, and what if he feels like they're not giving him the ball enough? . . . The Patriots have been a perfect salary-cap team, without the real superstars who eat up your cap, and that includes **Tom Brady**. But what if his girlfriend starts asking him, "How come Jake Delhomme makes more money than you do?" Maybe I'm looking for trouble, but sometimes you see these nagging things on teams that have had a lot of success. . . . Their backup quarterback situation was unsettled, but signing **Jim Miller** was smart. They start two street free agents on the offensive line, **Tom Ashworth** and **Russ Hochstein**, and you have to ask yourself, Are they really good enough, or was the game they played in the Super Bowl done with mirrors? . . . Their linebacker group might be the oldest in the NFL, but they really play well together. **Roman Phifer** is 36, **Willie McGinest** is 32. They've been great role players, but what if they lose their edge sometime during the season?

ASHWORTH



“Their linebacker group might be the oldest in the NFL, but they really play well together.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 14-2

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 27/9/17

DEFENSE 4/15/7

COACH: Bill Belichick;
fifth season with New
England (75-69 in NFL)

COREY DILLON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	12	138	541	3.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
II	71	6.5	2	

TOM BRADY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	39	527	317	60.2
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,620	23	12	85.9	

PATRICK PASS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	353	6	27	4.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
4	21	5.3	0	

ADAM VINATIERI

POS.	PVR	XP MADE	XP ATT.
K	113	37	38
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
25	34	112	

OFFENSE

DEION BRANCH

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	66	57	803	3

DANIEL GRAHAM

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	164	38	409	4

MATT LIGHT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	305	16	16

RUSS HOCHSTEIN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	305	15	1

DAN KOPPEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	296	16	15

JOE ANDRUZZI

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	312	16	16

TOM ASHWORTH

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	305	16	13

DAVID GIVENS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	127	34	510	6

DEFENSE

MIKE VRABEL

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	52	9½	2

TEDY BRUSCHI

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
ILB	128	2	3

RICHARD SEYMOUR

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	56	8	

KEITH TRAYLOR

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
NT	17	0	

TY WARREN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	33	1	

ROMAN PHIFER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
ILB	100	0	

WILLIE MCGINEST

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	67	5½	1



TYRONE POOLE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	59		6

RODNEY HARRISON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	125	3	3

EUGENE WILSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	61	0	4

TY LAW

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	74		6

JOSH MILLER

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	84	41.9

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

9 INDIANAPOLIS (T)
19 at Arizona
26 Open date

OCTOBER

3 at Buffalo
10 MIAMI
17 SEATTLE
24 N.Y. JETS
31 at Pittsburgh

NOVEMBER

7 at St. Louis
14 BUFFALO
22 at Kansas City (M)
28 BALTIMORE

DECEMBER

5 at Cleveland
12 CINCINNATI
20 at Miami (M)
26 at N.Y. Jets

JANUARY

2 SAN FRANCISCO

(M) MONDAY
(T) THURSDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-7 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .512 Games against playoff teams: 7

2

NEW YORK
JETS

The defense has a whole new look, with an aggressive coordinator and a handful of rookies who are being counted on to contribute immediately

RCA DOME, Indianapolis, Saturday, Aug. 21: Jets defensive coordinator Donnie Henderson was getting bored with the vanilla defenses he'd given his young defenders for a preseason game against the Colts, so on this play he positioned rookie cornerback Derrick Strait, a third-round draft pick, up close to the line to play wide-out Reggie Wayne straight up. And he moved rookie safety Erik Coleman, a fifth-rounder, into a blitz look, with the intention of blitzing him. Finally, Henderson stationed his prize rookie, linebacker Jonathan Vilma, a first-round choice, next to Strait and Coleman, directly across from tight end Marcus Pollard.

Quarterback Peyton Manning surveyed this alignment, licked his chops and audibled to one of the nastier items in the Indianapolis playbook. It was a pick play in which Pollard angled out, taking Vilma

The wondrous crop of defensive rookies has been the talk of Jets camp. Vilma, a tackling machine at Miami, flies to the ball with amazing speed. Henderson is trying him all over the place—in the middle, on the weak side—but he isn't quite sure where Vilma will be the most effective. Strait, out of Oklahoma, has shown he has the instincts to handle the slot receiver, making him a perfect candidate

for nickelback. Coleman, from Washington State, seemed perfect for the strong safety job the first day he reported for practice. But they are rookies. Kids. And quarterbacks around the NFL feast off players such as these. "Don't I know it,"

CENTERPIECE Vilma gets to the ball in a hurry, but at only 230 pounds, he'll need his linemen to tie up bigger blockers.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> "I went by the defensive coaches' office," coach Herman Edwards says, "and I asked them, 'Did 89 catch another touchdown today?' They haven't guarded him yet." Number 89 is **JERRICHO COTCHERY**, a fourth-round pick out of North Carolina State. Though not a burner, the 6-foot 207-pounder is a tough guy who'll catch the ball in a crowd.

with him and knocking Strait flat on his back, leaving the uncovered Wayne to run a slant underneath. The play went for 44 yards and set up the Colts' only touchdown of the night. Naturally, the officials never called the illegal pick. (This is the year they help the offense, remember?)

Looking at films of the play in his office a day later, Henderson let out a sigh as he realized the huge task ahead of him. "My fault," he said. "I've got to get them to do a better job of recognition. And I shouldn't have put them in such a situation."

DAVID E. KLUTHO



Henderson said. "It'll be an exciting season, but it won't be an easy one."

For the last five years, including the Ravens' 2000 Super Bowl season, Henderson coached the Baltimore secondary. What a joy, being able to work with that crushing defense. He'd love to turn Vilma into another Ray Lewis. The kid's smart, and he's got the personality to assume that role someday. But Lewis had two monster tackles, Sam Adams and Tony Siragusa, to keep the blockers off him in the championship season, and at 230 pounds Vilma is too light to take on guards and centers by himself. He needs a bodyguard, someone to tie up blockers.

Stationed in front of Vilma, playing the nose when the Jets go with an odd front, is 317-pound Dewayne Robertson, the fourth pick in the draft last year, the guy New York traded up to get. No matter how high they're drafted, interior defensive linemen seldom become stars their first year, and Robertson was no exception. The Jets wanted him to penetrate, shoot the gaps, collapse the pocket, and yes, he did show a burst at times, but he displayed little ball awareness.

Now coaches are asking him to add a two-gap to his repertoire, to impose his will on a pair of blockers. Oh, Robertson has seen plenty of double teams, but generally the blockers have been the ones imposing their will. He remains a work in progress. But give the Jets credit. They saw a slow and aging defense last season, and they overhauled the back seven. Having rookies and second-year men flying all over the field isn't a bad way to start.

The offense certainly is capable of big things, with Chad Pennington healthy and throwing to such talented wideouts as Santana Moss and Justin McCareins, who was acquired in a trade with the Titans. "It's kind of interesting, the shelf life you have in the NFL," says Pennington, who broke his wrist during the pre-season last year, an injury that all but doomed the Jets' hopes. "It seems to last around four years or so, then it's time to reload. It seems that just yesterday I was the young guy being groomed to take over. Now I'm in my fifth year and I'm a veteran leader."

The sooner the young guys start feeling the same way, the better for the Jets.

—P.Z.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

General manager **Terry Bradway's** first-round choices the last two years haven't been great. Defensive end **Bryan Thomas** doesn't start, and **Dewayne Robertson** hasn't really learned how to play yet. They followed with a defense-heavy draft this year. I'd call it a make-or-break draft for Bradway. . . . **Jonathan Vilma** has a chance to be great, if they use him right. But remember, he's a little guy. How well they can work their other young people in will be the key to the defense, and the defense is the key to the team because you know **Chad Pennington** and those guys can score points. . . . I think their best linebacker combination would be Vilma, **Eric Barton** and **Sam Cowart**, but **Victor Hobson** has a lock on the strongside position. I think he's the weakest of the bunch. People will go after him. . . . On offense it's a Big Three operation: Pennington, **Curtis Martin** and **Santana Moss**. God help the Jets if one of them gets hurt. Martin's backup, **LaMont Jordan**, is more of a problem than he's worth. The line is just O.K., but having **Pete Kendall** fall into their lap as a late free-agent pickup was big for them.

KENDALL



“On offense it's a Big Three operation: Chad Pennington, Curtis Martin and Santana Moss.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 6-10

NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 25/13/19
DEFENSE 28/10/21

COACH: Herman Edwards;
fourth season with New
York (25-23 in NFL)

CURTIS MARTIN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	42	323	1,308	4.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
42	262	6.2	2	

CHAD PENNINGTON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	46	297	189	63.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,139	13	12	82.9	

JERALD SOWELL

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	256	1	2	2.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
47	436	9.3	1	

DOUG BRIEN

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	225	24	24
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
27	32	105	

OFFENSE

SANTANA MOSS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	34	74	1,105	10

ANTHONY BECHT

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	86	40	356	4

JASON FABINI

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	304	16	16

PETE KENDALL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	279	14	13

KEVIN MAWAE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	289	16	16

BRANDON MOORE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	295	3	1

KAREEM MCKENZIE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	327	16	16

JUSTIN MCCAREINS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	122	47	813	8

DEFENSE

ERIC BARTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	133	½	0

JOHN ABRAHAM

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	32	6	

JASON FERGUSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	75	4½	

SAM COWART

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	140	2	0

DEWAYNE ROBERTSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	43	1½	

SHAUN ELLIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	69	12½	

VICTOR HOBSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	48	2	1



DAVID BARRETT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	79	1	

REGGIE TONGUE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	63	2	4

JON MCGRAW

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	30	0	0

DONNIE ABRAHAM

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	11	1	

TOBY GOWIN

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	94	39.0

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
12 CINCINNATI 19 at San Diego 26 Open date	3 at Miami 10 BUFFALO 17 SAN FRANCISCO 24 at New England	1 MIAMI (M) 7 at Buffalo 14 BALTIMORE 21 at Cleveland 28 at Arizona	5 HOUSTON 12 at Pittsburgh 19 SEATTLE 26 NEW ENGLAND	2 at St. Louis (M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-7** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.512** Games against playoff teams: **6**

3

BUFFALO
BILLS

New coach Mike Mularkey has some tricks up his sleeve for an offense that has a couple of new weapons, but first he has to straighten out the line

THE GIDDINESS that greeted the arrival of quarterback Drew Bledsoe in Buffalo two years ago—"the over-the-top parades," as he puts it—has subsided. The stands at training camp were only half to three-quarters full this summer, and the crowds were surprisingly subdued. That's what happens after a 6-10 season, one that cost coach Gregg Williams his job. Taking over is Mike Mularkey, who spent nine years in the league as a player and 10 as an assistant coach, including the last three as the Steelers' offensive coordinator.

"At least no one's booing," says Bledsoe, acquired in a trade with the Patriots in April 2002. "Talk about loyal fans. We owe them something this year."

So Bledsoe reported to camp at 228 pounds, "the lightest since my freshman year in college," he says. Bledsoe is still only 32, but let's face it, he'll never be considered mobile.

When his protection broke down (as it often did), and when go-to receiver Eric Moulds suffered a slight tear in his groin and was hobbled for most of the season, things fell apart last year. Bledsoe's 73.0 passer rating was his lowest since 1995.

So this year the Bills spent the 13th pick in the draft on a breathtakingly fast and, as they've discovered in camp, sure-handed wide receiver out of Wisconsin, Lee Evans. He is expected to take pressure off Moulds, who has had to be a flier and a possession

receiver. "It's going to be a big year for wideouts in Buffalo," says Moulds. "I talked to [Pittsburgh wideout] Hines Ward in the off-season, and he said, 'You're going to love Coach Mularkey's system. It gave me over 300 catches in the three years he was coordinator.'"

The Steelers also ran a lot of smash-mouth with Jerome Bettis, but opponents always had to be on the alert for the trick

play. Pittsburgh once ran a play with no quarterback on the field and a flanker under center, with everybody breaking for the sidelines. Mularkey also designed a series of plays out of the old double-wing formation. "You need the personnel to

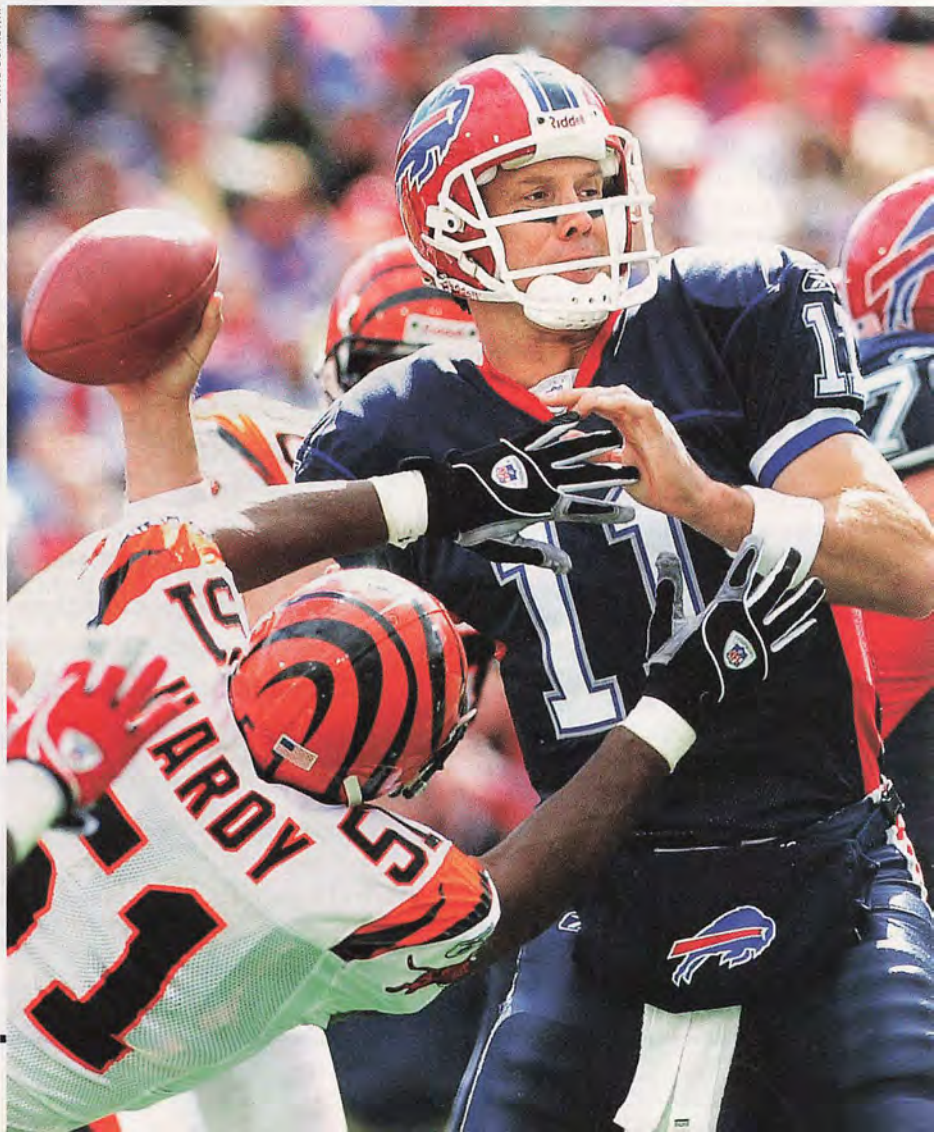
UNDER FIRE Bledsoe can still wing it, but that won't matter if the Bills can't protect him any better than they did in 2003.

PLAYER ON
THE RISE

> A 2003

fourth-round draft pick out of Northwestern State (La.), cornerback **TERRENCE MCGEE** intercepted two passes as a rookie and started a pair of games. At training camp this year, the 5' 9", 195-pound McGee turned heads with his athleticism. The Bills plan to use him in multiple coverages as a nickelback.

DAVID DUPRE/AP



make that stuff work" he says. "In Pittsburgh we had Kordell Stewart and Hines and Antwaan Randle El. Pretty good little package, huh? Here? Well, you never know. The other day I watched [wideout] Bobby Shaw goofing around, and I said, 'You ever play quarterback?' He said, 'Why?' I said, 'Just curious.'"

Bledsoe, the quarterback who figures to take almost all of the snaps, was sacked more times (49) than any other passer in the league last season, so Mularkey brought in 60-year-old Jim McNally as line coach. McNally is considered among the best in the business—he worked with Hall of Fame tackle Anthony Muñoz in Cincinnati in the 1980s—but he is coming off a bad year with the Giants, who expected him to work miracles with a subpar unit. McNally has more to work with in Buffalo. His biggest challenge might be getting the most out of right tackle Mike Williams, who has been mostly a disappointment since being selected with the fourth pick in the 2002 draft. In an attempt to motivate Williams, the Bills demoted him to second team at the start of camp. Though bothered by a sore arch, Williams pleased Mularkey with his conditioning work, and he was quickly back with the starting unit.

Motivation won't be a problem for Travis Henry, a 5' 9", 215-pound bundle of dynamite who ran for 1,356 yards in 2003 despite playing part of the season on a cracked fibula. During training camp Henry repeatedly answered questions about sharing time with Willis McGahee, the team's No. 1 draft pick in 2003, who sat out last season after suffering a crippling knee injury in his last game as a collegian, in January '03. The 25-year-old Henry is a prideful athlete, one of the most feared backs in the league, and his jaw sets as he repeats, "I'm proud of everything I've accomplished with this team."

Henry, who was slowed by bruised ribs during the preseason, will continue to get his carries, but the Bills are also high on McGahee, who has shown flashes of his old self during the preseason. Regardless of whoever carries the ball, the Bills should have enough weapons to win with if the offensive line holds up. If not, McGahee will at least give Buffalo fans a glimpse of the future. —P.Z.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

You've got to wonder about **Drew Bledsoe**. His career quarterback rating is 76.7, and in the playoffs it drops to 54.9. He's not getting any nimbler, and I don't really think too much of their offensive line. . . . [Club president] **Tom Donahoe** has to prove himself this season. O.K., he got killed by the salary cap his first year [2001], but what has he done since? This has got to be a winning season or the finger points to him. . . . I like their wideouts. **Eric Moulds** is a great player, and so is their running back, **Travis Henry**, although he's about ready to explode, with everyone constantly asking him how he likes sharing the load with **Willis McGahee**. . . . Defensively, they've gotten by. Their ends are all the same type, high-motor guys. Their two big tackles, **Sam Adams** and **Pat Williams**, will stuff the run for a series or two, but they tire quickly, and you've got to give them plenty of relief. I like their linebackers and secondary. . . . The Bills will be O.K. because their defense is solid, but not if they keep turning the ball over. And if they don't find a way to protect Bledsoe, that's what's going to happen.

HENRY



“They’ll be O.K. because their defense is solid, but not if they keep turning the ball over.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 6-10
NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 21/28/30
DEFENSE 8/2/2

COACH: Mike Mularkey;
first season as an NFL
head coach

TRAVIS HENRY					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
RB	26	331	1,356	4.1	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
28	158	5.6	11		

DREW BLEDSOE					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%	
QB	91	471	274	58.2	
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING		
2,860	11	12	73.0		

DAIMON SHELTON†					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
FB	368	0	0	—	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
7	34	4.9	0		

RIAN LINDELL					
POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.		
K	269	24	24		
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.			
17	24	75			

ERIC MOULDS					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	47	64	780	1	

MARK CAMPBELL					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
TE	226	34	339	1	

JONAS JENNINGS					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LT	6' 3"	325	11	11	

LAWRENCE SMITH					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LG	6' 3"	295	0	0	

TREY TEAGUE					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
C	6' 5"	300	16	16	

CHRIS VILLARRIAL					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RG	6' 3"	318	13	13	

MIKE WILLIAMS					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RT	6' 6"	360	13	13	

LEE EVANS (R)					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	151	64	1,213	13	

JEFF POSEY					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	64	5½	0		

AARON SCHOEDEL					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
RE	60	11½			

PAT WILLIAMS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
RT	82	0			

LONDON FLETCHER					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
MLB	133	2	0		

SAM ADAMS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
LT	33	5			

RYAN DENNEY					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
LE	43	3½			

TAKEO SPIKES					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	126	2	2		

BRIAN MOORMAN					
POS.	PUNTS	AVG.			
P	85	44.6			

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (stats for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) †2002 stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
12 JACKSONVILLE 19 at Oakland 26 Open date	3 NEW ENGLAND 10 at N.Y. Jets 17 MIAMI 24 at Baltimore 31 ARIZONA	7 N.Y. JETS 14 at New England 21 ST. LOUIS 28 at Seattle	5 at Miami 12 CLEVELAND 19 at Cincinnati 26 at San Francisco	2 PITTSBURGH

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-7** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.512** Games against playoff teams: **6**

4

MIAMI DOLPHINS

A shocking retirement and a season-ending injury turn a perennial playoff contender into an also-ran with more questions than answers

THINGS COULDN'T be better for the Dolphins, except for the following:

- They have an unsettled situation at quarterback.
- They've been shopping around for a feature running back.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> SETH MCKINNEY

started two games at center for the injured Tim Ruddy last year, and now he has the job full time. He's an aggressive blocker and will make the calls for a line that has four new starters. "In a sense I'm new," says McKinney, whose brother Steve starts at center for the Texans, "but this is my third year in the system, so I think I know what I'm doing."

- Their prize acquisition at wide receiver is out for the season.
- They've got four new starters on the offensive line.
- Almost half of their starters on defense are 30 or older.

Had enough? Oh, we could go on. After Miami finished out of the playoffs for the second straight year in 2003, owner Wayne Huizenga took action. He gave coach Dave

Wannstedt a two-year extension, but Huizenga stripped Wannstedt of his final-say authority on personnel matters. The owner installed Dan Marino as . . . well, it was hard to know just what his title and responsibilities were, except that he would be the overseer, above Wannstedt and Rick Spielman, who was promoted from vice president to general manager. Marino resigned three weeks later, saying he couldn't devote the time he needed to do the job right.

On the field A.J. Feeley, who came off the bench and showed flashes of brilliance during a 4-1 run for the Eagles two years ago, was acquired in a trade to challenge quarterback Jay Fiedler. He is the fourth player marked for Fiedler's job since 2000. "I try to keep the negative thoughts out and do the best I can," Fiedler says. "I have too much respect for the guys in here to listen to rumors and outsiders who don't know what's going on."

The knock on Fiedler is his inaccuracy. The big plus is that he's a tough competitor who knows how to win and is well-liked by teammates.

Miami had a hole to fill at running back after Ricky Williams retired one week before the start of training camp. The leading candidate is Travis Minor, but at 5' 10" and 205 pounds he's hardly built for heavy-duty work; Williams averaged a league-leading 24.2 carries per game during his two years as a Dolphin, but in three years Minor has never carried more than 59 times in a season.

At least the off-season trade that brought wideout David Boston from the Chargers gave Miami fans something to get excited about heading into camp. Boston was seen as a second downfield

FALLING FAST Chambers gives Miami a deep threat, but he may be asked to do even more to help a decimated offense.



ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

threat to complement Chris Chambers, but he was lost for the season on Aug. 6 when he injured the patellar tendon in his left knee. Derrius Thompson, who was an erratic possession receiver last year, was penciled in to replace Boston, but on Aug. 21 Miami sent holdout defensive end Adelwale Ogunleye, the AFC sack leader last season, to the Bears for wideout Marty Booker, a Pro Bowl receiver in 2002. (The Dolphins wanted running back Anthony Thomas included in the deal, but Chicago threw in a 2005 third-round draft choice instead.)

"So what do you do? Do you give up on the season or put all this behind you and move on?" says the eternally optimistic Wannstedt. "We've still got a fine defense, and we're going to try not to put it in bad spots."

"Look at it this way," says middle linebacker Zach Thomas, the team's defensive leader. "What if Ricky hadn't quit? What if he'd gotten hurt the first day and been lost for the season? There wouldn't be all this moaning and groaning. We'd just have said, 'O.K., let's move on.' It seems that every year we're picked to win the division, then something bad happens. Well, this is a new experience. We're picked to do absolutely nothing, and I think this is going to get us mad. It's going to be a motivator."

In his office at the Dolphins' complex Spielman and pro personnel director George Paton were watching tape of a practice from early in camp. On one play cornerback Will Poole, a rookie fourth-round draft choice out of Southern Cal, crowded the 230-pound Boston on a dig pattern, then reached in and knocked down the pass. "Been making plays like that since camp opened," Spielman said. "The kid's really going to be something."

Two plays later cornerback Reggie Howard, who started for Carolina in the Super Bowl last February and was just coming into his own when he landed in Miami as a free agent, matched Chambers stride for stride on a deep route and knocked the ball away. "Add these two guys to Patrick Surtain and Sam Madison," Paton said, "and I defy you to name a team with four better corners."

"There are young guys all over the lineup who excite us," Spielman said. Maybe they can light a fire—or at least provide a spark.

—P.Z.

This is a staff with some really good assistant coaches, but can they work miracles? I know I wouldn't want to be **Tony Wise**, the offensive line coach. They drafted [tackle] **Vernon Carey** in the first round, and he can't even crack this mediocre lineup. A lot of people love **Jeno James**, the guard they got from Carolina; they call him a mauler, but he looks like just another guy to me. **John St. Clair** failed in St. Louis. Everyone raves about the athletic ability of **Wade Smith**, but I saw him struggling a lot last year. . . . They're kidding themselves if they go into the season with **Travis Minor** as their feature back. They're going to have to pick up somebody, but I don't know how much they're willing to trade for a back. . . . As for their quarterback situation, I like **Jay Fiedler** probably more than anyone else does. I think the guy will be O.K. if they just stop messing with him. . . . I like all three of their defensive tackles, **Tim Bowens**, **Larry Chester** and **Jeff Zgonina**. They have a good rotation going there, and I think that's the strength of their defense. No back ran for 100 yards against the Dolphins last year.

BOWENS



“They’re kidding themselves if they go into the season with Travis Minor as their feature back.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 17/26/24

DEFENSE 5/19/10

COACH: Dave Wannstedt;
fifth season with Miami
(81-79 in NFL)

TRAVIS MINOR				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	115	41	193	4.7
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
4	13	3.3	1	

JAY FIEDLER				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	160	314	179	57.0
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,138	11	13	72.4	

ROB KONRAD				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	175	4	17	4.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
16	166	10.4	0	

OLINDO MARE				
POS.	PVR	KPs MADE	KPs ATT.	
K	247	33	34	
FG MADE	FG ATT.	Pts.		
22	29	99		

OFFENSE

CHRIS CHAMBERS				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	52	64	963	11

RANDY MCMICHAEL				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	87	49	598	2

WADE SMITH				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	300	16	16

JENO JAMES				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	310	16	16

SETH MCKINNEY				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	305	16	3

TAYLOR WHITLEY				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	315	0	0

JOHN ST. CLAIR				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 4"	320	16	0

MARTY BOOKER				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	142	52	715	4

DEFENSE

MORLON GREENWOOD				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	66	½	0	

JASON TAYLOR				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
RE	56	13		

LARRY CHESTER				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
RT	38	0		

ZACH THOMAS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
MLB	153	1	3	

TIM BOWENS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
LT	27	2		

DAVID BOWENS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
LE	2	1		

JUNIOR SEAU				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	96	3	0	

SAM MADISON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	50	3		

SAMMY KNIGHT				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
SS	98	0	3	

ANTUAN EDWARDS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
FS	50	1	1	

PATRICK SURTAIN				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	53	7		

MATT TURK				
POS.	PUNTS	AVG.		
P	68	38.7		

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
12 TENNESSEE 19 at Cincinnati 26 PITTSBURGH	3 N.Y. JETS 10 at New England 17 at Buffalo 24 ST. LOUIS	1 at N.Y. Jets (M) 7 ARIZONA 14 Open date 21 at Seattle 28 at San Francisco	5 BUFFALO 12 at Denver 20 NEW ENGLAND (M) 26 CLEVELAND	2 at Baltimore (M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 4 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .531 Games against playoff teams: 6

BALTIMORE RAVENS

The education of quarterback Kyle Boller continues, with a run at another Super Bowl hinging on whether he can master the position

PRACTICE HAD just ended on a sweltering August afternoon, and as usual, someone was giving quarterback Kyle Boller advice. In this case it was tight end Todd Heap discussing ball placement on a route over the middle. It just as easily

could have been linebacker Ray Lewis tutoring Boller on how to look off defenders, or any one of the four coaches who work directly with the second-year quarterback: offensive coordinator Matt Cavanaugh (game plan and strategy), senior consultant Jim Fassell (mechanics), quarterbacks and receivers coach David Shaw (film breakdown and day-to-day adjust-

ments) or coach Brian Billick (general oversight). In fact, Boller has been so inundated with counsel that he probably wouldn't be surprised if a water boy tried to give him pointers on how to make his reads. "Sometimes it gets a little, well . . . you hear different things," Boller says diplomatically. "But if there are too many coaches talking at once, I just go in and tell [Billick]. So far it's worked out."

All the attention may be a bit stifling, but it is understandable. The Ravens are as deep and as talented as any team in the league at almost every position except quarterback. As a rookie last season Boller played in 11 games, going 5-4 as a starter before suffering an injury to his left quadriceps against the Rams on Nov. 9. (Backup Anthony Wright then won five of seven starts in leading the team to the division title.) Though Boller is still regarded as the team's quarterback of the future, he must overcome his erratic play. He

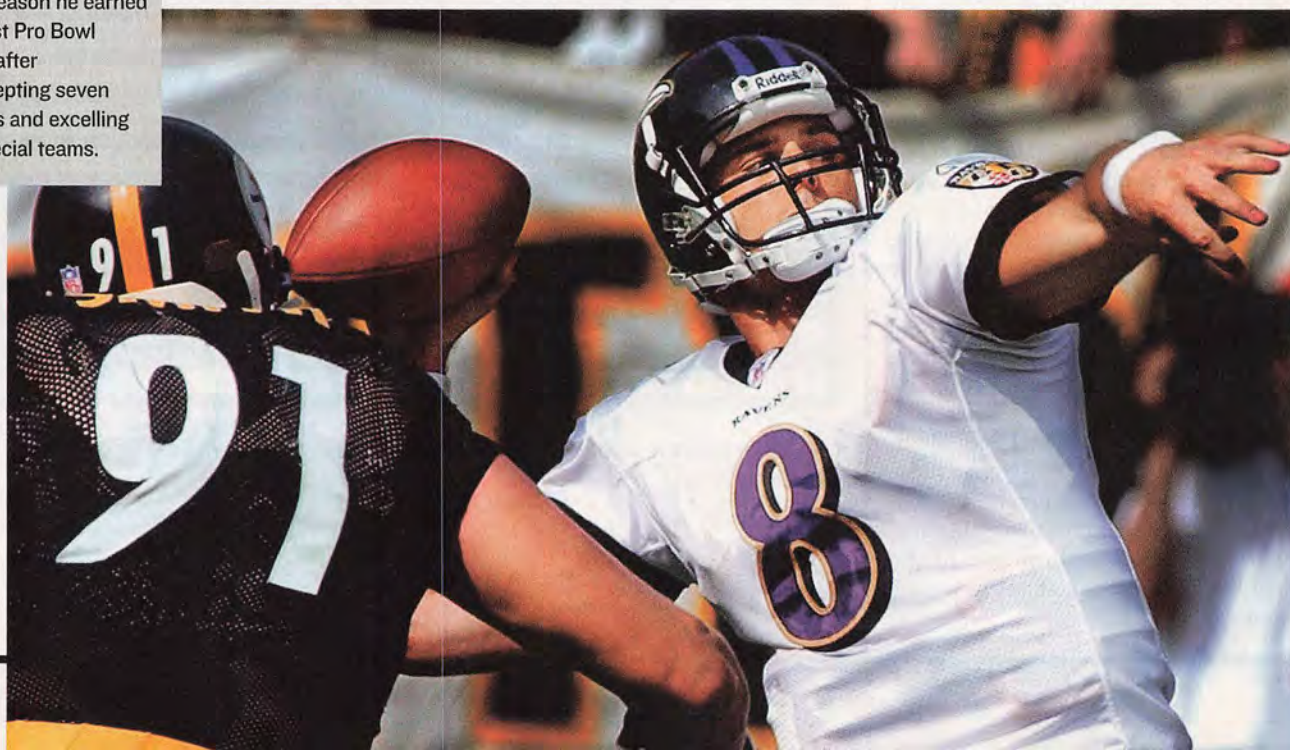
threw the deep ball well but too often stared down his primary receiver, jittered in the pocket and made questionable decisions. He was next to last in the league in passer rating (62.4), completion percentage (51.8%) and yards per attempt (5.62).

Along the way, however, he received a crash course in NFL Quarterbacking 101. He was the starter in the season opener at Pittsburgh and through nine games learned what it's like to shoulder the expectations of a football-mad town like Baltimore. Billick says it was all part of a master plan. "When we started a rookie quarterback at Pittsburgh, everybody was saying, 'God, how can you do that?'" says Billick. "But now I think they can see that it's a huge asset for us. That first start of a season is not looming over Kyle's head."

GOING DEEP Boller showed promise as a rookie starter but was often erratic and completed just 51.8% of his passes.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Strong safety **ED REED** spends much of his free time breaking down film at the home of teammate Ray Lewis. The extra work appears to be paying off as the 5' 11", 200-pound Reed is quickly developing into one of the league's premier defensive players. Last season he earned his first Pro Bowl berth after intercepting seven passes and excelling on special teams.



He's been there, done that. That's invaluable experience."

Not every rookie quarterback benefits from that sort of on-the-job training (see Ryan Leaf), but Boller is certainly further along than most second-year passers. Having had a house built in the Baltimore area, he spent more of the off-season at the team's practice facility training, rehabbing his quad injury and recovering from minor surgery on his left (non-throwing) shoulder. Working with Fassell this summer, he focused on ball security—his nine fumbles last season were converted into 31 points by opponents—and footwork, specifically "sitting soft" in the pocket instead of dropping back and then hopping forward as he looks downfield. "Last year I would hitch up, and next thing you know I'd be in a lineman's a--," says Boller, who will work with backup center Casey Rabach while Mike Flynn recovers from a broken collarbone. "So this year I'll start out fast, take my drop and then kind of bounce and settle soft."

Boller's small armada of coaches and unsolicited advisers have also emphasized to him that he doesn't have to have an All-Pro-caliber season for Baltimore to win. The Ravens have three of the best defensive players in the league in Lewis, strong safety Ed Reed and cornerback Chris McAlister; offensive stars in Heap, running back Jamal Lewis (who is scheduled to go on trial for drug charges on Nov. 1) and tackle Jonathan Ogden; and plenty of veteran role players with playoff experience. All they need from Boller is, as Heap puts it, "a few more completions a game."

So Billick talks about how his young quarterback has to learn that "discretion is the better part of valor" and says Boller can give his team a better chance of winning by avoiding the egregious mistake. "We don't need crazy, explosive plays," says Heap. "This team won a Super Bowl with Trent Dilfer."

Be like Trent is not the motto of most Super Bowl contenders, but Boller understands the point being made. "I just need to play smart and complete 60 percent of my passes," he says. That may not sound like much, he allows, but it's all relative. "Expectations," he says, "are a lot different when your goal is the Super Bowl."

Now, that's sound advice.

—Chris Ballard

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

They're going to win games the way they always have—with good defense and an effective running game—because **Kyle Boller** hasn't progressed as much as you'd expect for a second-year quarterback who played a lot [as a rookie]. . . . Boller doesn't have much to work with at receiver. **Kevin Johnson** is a solid possession guy, but I don't expect **Travis Taylor** to be any better than he's been in the past. . . . If **Jamal Lewis** doesn't get in trouble with those drug charges, he'll be dominant. He's too talented, and that line is too strong. **Jonathan Ogden** is the star, but I think **Edwin Mulitalo** is underrated. . . . Defensively, everybody talks about **Ray Lewis**, but they have a ton of talent at linebacker. **Terrell Suggs** has an explosive burst as an edge rusher, and **Adalius Thomas** is a sturdy run defender. The guy who doesn't get enough credit is **Ed Hartwell**. He's instinctive, and he makes a lot of plays. . . . **Ed Reed** is a ball hawk at strong safety. Some guys at that position just react to plays, but he sees things before they happen. . . . I don't think **Chris McAlister** is a premier corner, but I'd still take the guy on my team.



HARTWELL

“Ed Reed is a ball hawk. Some guys react to plays, but he sees things before they happen.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 1/32/21

DEFENSE 6/4/3

COACH: Brian Billick;
sixth season with
Baltimore (47-33 in NFL)

JAMAL LEWIS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	7	387	2,066	5.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
26	205	7.9	14	

KYLE BOLLER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	98	224	116	51.8
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,260	7	9	62.4	

ALAN RICARD

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	293	19	79	4.2
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
9	62	6.9	1	

MATT STOVER

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	156	35	35
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
33	38	134	

OFFENSE

KEVIN JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	90	58	634	3

TODD HEAP

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	33	57	693	3

JONATHAN OGDEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 9"	340	16	16

EDWIN MULITALO

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	345	15	15

CASEY RABACH

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	301	14	2

BENNIE ANDERSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	345	16	15

ORLANDO BROWN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	360	16	13

TRAVIS TAYLOR

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	150	39	632	3

DEFENSE

ADALIUS THOMAS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	27	4	0

RAY LEWIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
ILB	163	1½	6

MARQUES DOUGLAS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	63	4½	

GARY BAXTER

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	83	3	

KELLY GREGG

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
NT	80	3	

ED REED

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	70	1	7

TONY WEAVER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	36	5	

WILL DEMPS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	39	0	2

ED HARTWELL

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
ILB	94	3	1

CHRIS McALISTER

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	43	3	

TERRELL SUGGS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	27	12	1

DAVE ZASTUDIL

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.	
P	89	41.0	

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at Cleveland
19 PITTSBURGH
26 at Cincinnati

OCTOBER

4 KANSAS CITY (M)
10 at Washington
17 Open date
24 BUFFALO
31 at Philadelphia

NOVEMBER

7 CLEVELAND
14 at N.Y. Jets
21 DALLAS
28 at New England

DECEMBER

5 CINCINNATI
12 N.Y. GIANTS
19 at Indianapolis
26 at Pittsburgh

JANUARY

2 MIAMI

(M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-16 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .508

Games against playoff teams: 6

2 CINCINNATI BENGALS

As running back Rudi Johnson and quarterback Carson Palmer move front and center, hopes are high for ending a 14-year playoff drought

RUDI JOHNSON crinkles his nose and grimaces as he talks about the brutal off-season workouts he endured in preparation for his first season as the Bengals' feature running back. He mentions weightlifting, swimming, footwork and agility drills, kickboxing classes and, the centerpiece of his regimen, showdowns against his cousin Armin Harris at a Virginia Beach recreation center. "We'd lock ourselves in the pit and just go at it for three hours," says Johnson. "I'd be drenched in sweat, just dead by the end." And what exactly were these two modern

BREAKING OUT The departure of Dillon cleared the way for the powerful Johnson (below) to become the featured back.

gladiators doing, locked in this subterranean pit? "Racquetball, man," says Johnson, adjusting his skullcap and nodding emphatically. "It's real good for quickness. You're in such a small space, and that little ball is fast. It keeps you on your toes."

Johnson's conditioning and agility will be important factors in Cincinnati's bid to end a 14-year playoff drought. The more effectively he runs, the less pressure there will be on quarterback Carson Palmer, the No. 1 pick in the 2003 draft, who was named the starter by coach Marvin Lewis in the off-season after backing up Jon Kitna last year. As Palmer grows into the job, the Bengals will turn to the 24-year-old Johnson to jump-start the offense.

It is quite a contrast to his situation last


fall, when Johnson, a fourth-round choice in 2001, started the season third on the depth chart, behind Corey Dillon and Brandon Bennett. At 5' 10", 220 pounds Johnson is a thick, powerful back who runs well between the tackles. As a junior he had the second-best rushing year in Auburn history (1,567 yards, 219 behind Bo Jackson's total in 1985), but he played in only nine games in his first two NFL seasons combined. Last year, however, after Dillon went down with knee

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Defensive end **JUSTIN SMITH** had his best all-around season last year, with 60 tackles. The fourth pick in the 2001 draft, he's been the Bengals' most productive lineman during his three seasons. Fast, intense and strong—he lists weightlifting as his favorite hobby—Smith will be the stopper on a unit that must improve on its No. 28 ranking of a year ago.



STEVE MESSIA/AP

A large photograph showing the interior of a Toyota Sequoia from the passenger side. The view is looking out through the front windshield at a family of four (a man, a woman, and two children) walking on a pebbly beach near a body of water. The car's interior features leather seats, a sunroof, and a dashboard with a radio and air vents.

Right before your eyes, they'll be hundreds of miles away at college.

THE 8-PASSENGER SEQUOIA.

They grow up fast. Enjoy it while you can. With a 240-hp V8 engine, 5-link rear suspension and seating for eight, the Toyota Sequoia lets you take your family anywhere, anytime. And its Vehicle Stability Control (VSC)¹ + Traction Control (TRAC) and Anti-lock Brake System (ABS), get you home safely too. Just in time to start planning for the next trip.

A horizontal strip of four small images. From left to right: 1. Three people running on a path. 2. A green mountain landscape under a cloudy sky. 3. A family of four walking away on a path. 4. A winding road through a green landscape.

GET THE FEELING

The Toyota logo, consisting of three overlapping ellipses.

TOYOTA

Vehicle shown with available equipment. ¹Toyota Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) is an electronic system designed to help the driver maintain vehicle control under adverse conditions. It is not a substitute for safe driving practices. Factors including speed, road conditions and driver steering input can all affect whether VSC will be effective in preventing a loss of control. Please see your Owner's Manual for further details. ©2003 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

and groin injuries and Bennett faltered, Johnson came off the bench to lead Cincinnati in rushing. He also set a team record by running for 150 or more yards three times in a season, despite getting only five starts.

The emergence of Johnson allowed the Bengals to trade Dillon, who'd been at odds with the front office, to the Patriots for a second-round draft selection. The move helps team chemistry, but it will be a challenge to replace the productivity of Dillon, who had six consecutive 1,000-yard seasons before his drop-off last year. "Corey was a quick hitter and a hard runner, whereas Rudi is more patient," says left tackle Levi Jones. "He searches for the hole, then explodes. That comes from getting all the reps while [Dillon] was injured."

The 6' 5", 310-pound Jones, soft-spoken and with a high threshold for pain, is another vital player in the Protect Palmer campaign. He suffered torn cartilage in his right knee on Dec. 7, but he had arthroscopic surgery and played the following week in a win against the 49ers that kept the team in playoff contention. Jones and right tackle Willie Anderson, an excellent run blocker who hasn't been flagged for holding in two seasons, anchor a solid line whose main objective will be to buy time for their second-year passer. "[Young] quarterbacks are always going to struggle some," says Jones. "Our emphasis all camp has been holding our blocks a little longer so Carson can get through his progressions. If we can do that and Rudi can get off to a fast start, we'll be all right."

Not so fast. Even if Johnson runs as well as hoped and Palmer lives up to his potential—Lewis says the team will build its offense around his deep-passing ability—the Bengals may be held back by a defense that ranked 28th in the league in points and yards allowed in 2003. At least Cincinnati signed or traded for three new defensive starters (middle linebacker Nate Webster, cornerback Deltha O'Neal and safety Kim Herring), giving Lewis reason to be optimistic. "At the beginning of last season we didn't have an identity," he says. "I think we have an identity now. We know who we are and where we're headed."

Whether the Bengals' final destination is the playoffs, Johnson can't say, but he does promise something that has been in short supply for the team's fans for many years. "This season," he says, "is going to be a lot of fun." —C.B.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

The Bengals have the scariest offense in the division. They have the potential to score every time they touch the ball. . . . **Rudi Johnson** is for real. He doesn't have home run speed, but he's an instinctive runner. They'll have a nice one-two combination with him and [rookie] **Chris Perry**. . . . They're loaded at receiver. **Chad Johnson** can fly. **Kelley Washington** is a big guy with 4.4 speed. **T.J. Houshmandzadeh** can run. The slowest guy is **Peter Warrick**, and he has the quickness to be a dangerous slot receiver. . . . They've made a lot of changes on defense. They brought in **Nate Webster** to play middle linebacker, but he's undersized. If they can't keep blockers off him, he's going to get swallowed up. They moved **Kevin Hardy** to outside linebacker, which is a natural spot for him. **Brian Simmons** is a playmaker. . . . Their secondary is suspect. **Deltha O'Neal** has had one good year, **Rogers Beckett** is a hitter with no ball skills, and **Kim Herring** doesn't have much speed. **Tory James** is probably the best player back there, and he's more of a nickel guy than a true starting corner.

HARDY



Rudi Johnson is for real. He doesn't have home run speed, but he's an instinctive runner.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics



2003 RECORD: 8-8

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 13/12/13

DEFENSE T-25/24/28

COACH: Marvin Lewis;
second season with
Cincinnati (8-8 in NFL)

RUDI JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	11	215	957	4.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
21	146	7.0	9	

CARSON PALMER*

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	64	489	309	63.2
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,942	33	10	149.1	

JEREMI JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	272	15	41	2.7
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
15	82	5.5	2	

SHAYNE GRAHAM

POS.	PVR	Ks MADE	Ks ATT.
K	188	40	40
FG MADE	FG ATT.	Pts.	
22	25	106	

OFFENSE

CHAD JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	25	90	1,355	10

REGGIE KELLY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	261	13	81	1

LEVI JONES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMs.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	310	16	16

ERIC STEINBACH

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMs.	STARTS
LG	6' 6"	297	15	15

RICH BRAHAM

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMs.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	305	16	15

BOBBIE WILLIAMS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMs.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	320	16	11

WILLIE ANDERSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMs.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	340	16	16

PETER WARRICK

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	76	79	819	8

DEFENSE

KEVIN HARDY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	92	1½	0

JUSTIN SMITH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	60	5	

TONY WILLIAMS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	38	2	

NATE WEBSTER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	51	1	0

JOHN THORNTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	31	6	

DUANE CLEMONS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	42	6	

BRIAN SIMMONS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	103	1½	2

KYLE RICHARDSON

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	49	40.0

TORY JAMES

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	63	4	

ROGERS BECKETT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	67	3	2

KIM HERRING†

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	75	0	3

DELTHA O'NEAL

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	22	1	

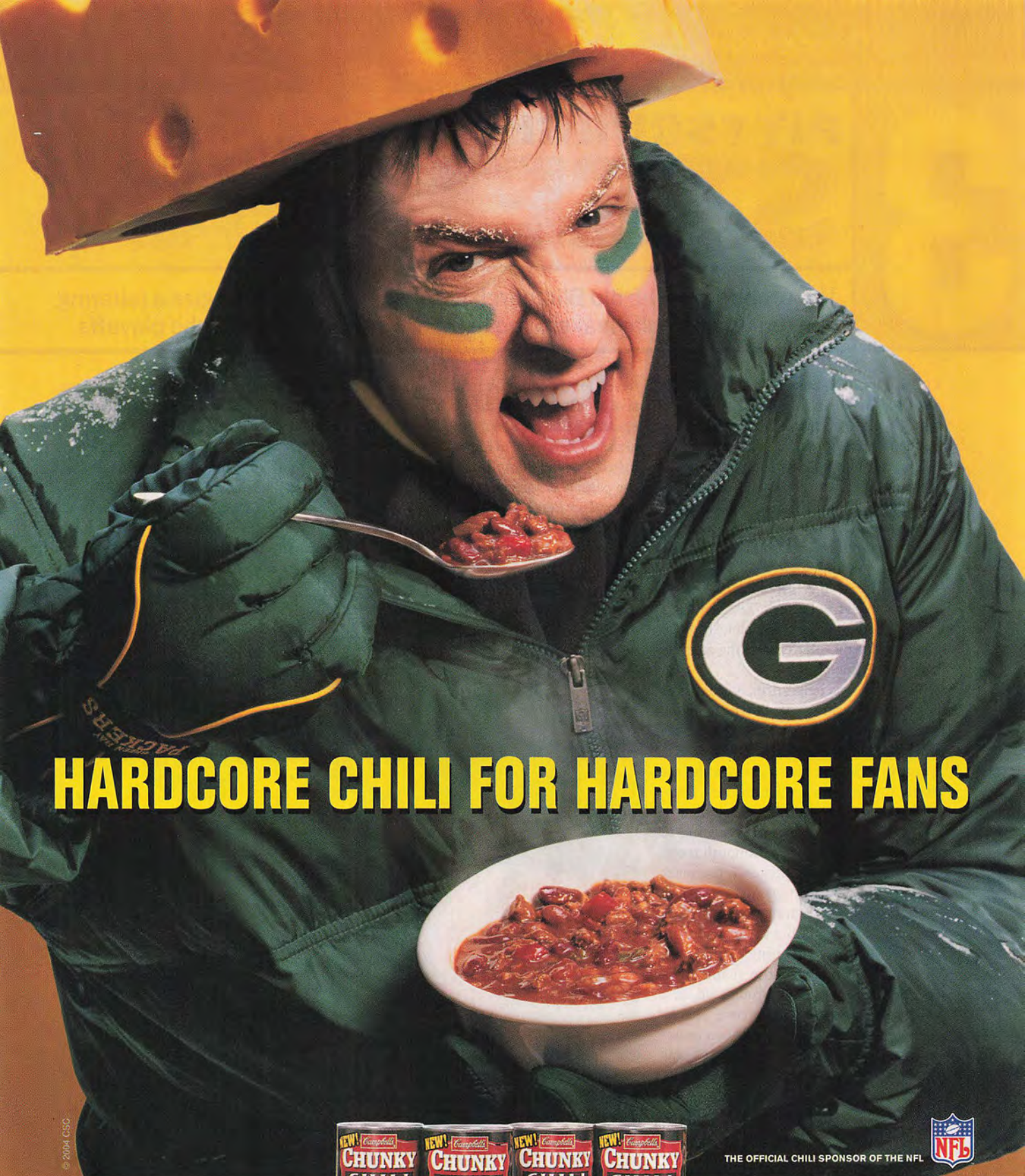
NEW ACQUISITION *statistics for 2002 college season PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) †2002 stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
12 at N.Y. Jets	3 at Pittsburgh	7 DALLAS	5 at Baltimore	2 at Philadelphia
19 MIAMI	10 Open date	14 at Washington	12 at New England	
26 BALTIMORE	17 at Cleveland	21 PITTSBURGH	19 BUFFALO	
	25 DENVER (M)	28 CLEVELAND	26 N.Y. GIANTS	
	31 at Tennessee			(M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-7** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.512** Games against playoff teams: **6**



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3 PITTSBURGH STEELERS

The architect of the old Blitzburgh defense returns to energize a faltering unit, but lacking playmakers the team will struggle to make the playoffs

IT PROBABLY wasn't what new defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau had in mind when he instructed his players to apply more pressure, but he had to like the effort he saw during a blitz-pickup drill in training camp. Linebacker Joey Porter made a nifty move to evade the block of running back Duce Staley and took down coach Bill Cowher, standing in at quarterback, with a swift two-hand shove to the back. Cowher was uninjured, if a little surprised, and vowed it would be Porter's "last sack." For his part, Porter jokingly said later, "If you're going to play the quarterback, the quarterback gets tackled."

Though it was only a drill, Steelers fans hope it is a harbinger of blitzes to come. After a 6-10 season in which its once-feared defense was tied for 17th in the league in sacks and set a dubious franchise record by forcing only 25 turnovers, Pitts-

burgh has retooled in hopes of returning to its smashmouth roots. To this end, the most important off-season signing was not a player but rather LeBeau. During his first stint with the team, from 1992 through '96, first as defensive backs coach and then as coordinator, LeBeau was the architect of the Blitzburgh defenses. He originated the zone blitz—in which a lineman drops into coverage and into the area usually occupied by a blitzing teammate—and oversaw a unit that racked up 51 sacks in his last season. In '97

he left for Cincinnati, where he was defensive coordinator and then coach for three seasons each. He spent 2003 as the Bills' assistant head coach. Meanwhile, in Pittsburgh, Cowher became disenchanted with the passive defensive schemes of coordinator Tim Lewis, fired him after the season and called LeBeau last January, asking him to come back. Within a week LeBeau was holed up in a Steelers office watching

game tape in preparation for this season. The team welcomed him back enthusiastically. "When he speaks, I listen, because when something comes out of his mouth, it's like the gospel truth," says defensive line coach John Mitchell.

BACKBREAKER The speedy Farrior (51), who had a team-leading 137 tackles in '03, will be counted on to make more big plays.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Pittsburgh traded up in the second round of the draft to select **RICARDO COLCLOUGH** out of Division II Tusculum College. He'll be a nice addition to the secondary, but it is his potential as a return man that has the Steelers excited. In Pittsburgh's first preseason game he returned a kickoff 59 yards. Teammates are raving about his speed and athleticism.

burgh has retooled in hopes of returning to its smashmouth roots. To this end, the most important off-season signing was not a player but rather LeBeau.

During his first stint with the team, from 1992 through '96, first as defensive backs coach and then as coordinator, LeBeau was the architect of the Blitzburgh defenses. He originated the zone blitz—in which a lineman drops into coverage and into the area usually occupied by a blitzing teammate—and oversaw a unit that racked up 51 sacks in his last season. In '97



"I love him," says lineman Kimo von Oelhoffen, who led the team with eight sacks last year. "He brings out the best in you."

All the good feeling doesn't necessarily translate into big stops on third down, however. As good a tactician as LeBeau is, he doesn't have anywhere near the horses he did in his first go-round with Pittsburgh. At that time the Steelers boasted a squadron of "Hawaii guys" (LeBeau's term for Pro Bowl players), including Rod Woodson, Carnell Lake, Kevin Greene and Greg Lloyd. This unit is mostly unproven and inexperienced, the result of an off-season purge, including the departure of linebacker Jason Gildon and five notable veterans. (Also, eight coaches were replaced or assigned different responsibilities.) Two starters from last year's suspect secondary—Brent Alexander and Dewayne Washington—are gone. Nickelback Deshea Townsend steps in at corner, and Troy Polamalu, the team's first-round draft choice in 2003, takes over at strong safety.

The strength of the defense will, as always, be the linebackers. James Farrior led the team with 137 tackles last season and has good speed. Kendrell Bell has dropped the 20 pounds he put on last year in a failed experiment, and LeBeau plans to use him in nickel coverage to take advantage of his speed. A healthy Porter, who was frustrated by the team's lack of aggressiveness last season, will be the centerpiece of the blitz schemes. He estimates he was only at 70% capability last season while recovering from an early September gunshot wound. He was noticeably slower, and his numbers (66 tackles, five sacks) were down from his Pro Bowl season in 2002, when he had 89 tackles and nine sacks.

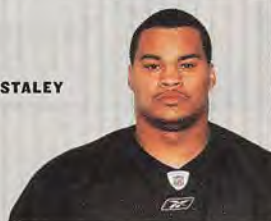
LeBeau will continue to run a basic 3-4 but with new pressure schemes and a mix of formations. "We'll play three linemen, four linemen, might even put five linemen in there sometimes," he says. "We'll have one 'backer, two 'backers, three 'backers. I don't want the opponent to know what they're going to get every third down."

Even if the defense improves markedly, the Steelers will have a tough time making the playoffs. Still, the retro makeover, which is reflected on the offensive side by a renewed emphasis on the power running game, is a step in the right direction. As wideout Plaxico Burress says, "If we can get back to who we used to be, we'll be a force." —C.B.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

I like what **Duce Staley** will do for this team. He is, in a lot of ways, like a younger, more athletic **Jerome Bettis**. He's a bruiser inside, but he can hurt you outside. They'll need him to be big. . . . **Tommy Maddox** doesn't impress me. He looks like a guy who got his shot at age 30 and had one dream year. He's maxed out. But **Ben Roethlisberger** will be a good one, with his pinpoint accuracy and big, rangy body. . . . I like their receivers. **Hines Ward** is such an all-around wonder: He catches passes, he's tough, he's a team guy, and he's as fierce a blocker as there is. **Plaxico Burress** is gifted, but he needs a strong teammate to be the lead guy. . . . Their defensive line doesn't need to be great in the 3-4 scheme, but **Kimo von Oelhoffen** is a blue-collar horse. He's a smart, savvy player who knows how to occupy blockers. . . . **Kendrell Bell** is as special as any pass-rushing linebacker. **Joey Porter** is still the tough personality of the team. . . . **Chad Scott** is their only impact player in the secondary. **Deshea Townsend** is too short and slow to be a legitimate starting corner in the NFL; trotting out a 5' 9" guy with 4.6 speed just won't get it done.

STALEY



"Hines Ward catches passes, he's a team guy, he's tough, and he's as fierce a blocker as there is."

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 6-10

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 31/14/22

DEFENSE 12/11/9

COACH: Bill Cowher; 13th season with Pittsburgh (115-76-1 in NFL)

DUCE STALEY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	23	96	463	4.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
36	382	10.6	7	

TOMMY MADDOX

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	182	519	298	57.4
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,414	18	17	75.3	

DAN KREIDER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	325	7	29	4.1
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
9	107	11.9	0	

JEFF REED

POS.	PVR	XPts MADE	XPts ATT.
K	203	31	32
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
23	32	100	

OFFENSE

HINES WARD

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	49	95	1,163	10

JAY RIEMERSMA

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	233	10	138	1

MARVEL SMITH

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	310	6	6

ALAN FANECA

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	312	16	16

JEFF HARTINGS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	301	16	16

KEYDRICK VINCENT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	330	10	9

OLIVER ROSS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	317	16	11

PLAXICO BURRESS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	72	60	860	4

DEFENSE

JOEY PORTER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	66	5	0

JAMES FARRIOR

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
ILB	137	0	1

KIMO VON OELHOFFEN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	35	8	

CASEY HAMPTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
NT	39	1	

AARON SMITH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	45	2	

KENDRELL BELL

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
ILB	100	1	1

CLARK HAGGANS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	16	1	0



DESHEA TOWNSEND

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	43	3	

TROY POLAMALU

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	23	2	0

CHRIS HOPE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	13	0	0

CHAD SCOTT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	56	3	

CHRIS GARDOCKI

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	72	41.9

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 OAKLAND
19 at Baltimore
26 at Miami

OCTOBER

3 CINCINNATI
10 CLEVELAND
17 at Dallas
24 Open date
31 NEW ENGLAND

NOVEMBER

7 PHILADELPHIA
14 at Cleveland
21 at Cincinnati
28 WASHINGTON

DECEMBER

5 at Jacksonville
12 N.Y. JETS
18 at N.Y. Giants (S)
26 BALTIMORE

JANUARY

2 at Buffalo

(S) SATURDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 30 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .477 Games against playoff teams: 6

4

CLEVELAND
BROWNS

Getting released by the 49ers could turn out to be the best thing for Jeff Garcia and his new team, which needed a leader at quarterback

AS THE QUARTERBACKS went through passing drills one day in camp, two young boys watched in awe from behind an end zone. "That's Jeff Garcia!" said the smaller of the two, pointing excitedly at Cleveland's new starting quarterback. He paused and took another look. "He's so short."

"I told you so," his buddy said.

They watched for a few minutes, then provided a bystander with unsolicited comments. "We like Garcia because he's tough," said the tall boy.

"Yeah, we didn't like Tim Couch," said the other, who was sporting an oversized T-shirt with players' signatures on it. "He didn't pull his weight."

And there you have it, the conventional wisdom on Browns quarterbacks of the past (inconsistent) and the future (tough, if undersized) nicely summed up by a

couple of kids who probably weren't even born when Bernie Kosar was the team's star passer. Couch, the first pick in the 1999 draft, never lived up to expectations, and after four turbulent seasons as the starter he played listlessly in splitting the job with Kelly Holcomb last year. Heading into the off-season, the Browns had to decide whether to re-sign Couch or, in coach Butch Davis's words, "go after the A.J. Feeleys and those type of guys"—backups on other teams who were ready to become starters. But in March

the 49ers released Garcia, a four-year starter whose tenure had been marked by individual accomplishment (three Pro Bowls) and constant criticism from one of his receivers (Terrell Owens), and Cleveland changed course. "When he became available, immediately it was all settled," says Davis. "He gives you a clearly defined leader. There's no quarterback controversy."

Not only is the gritty Garcia a much

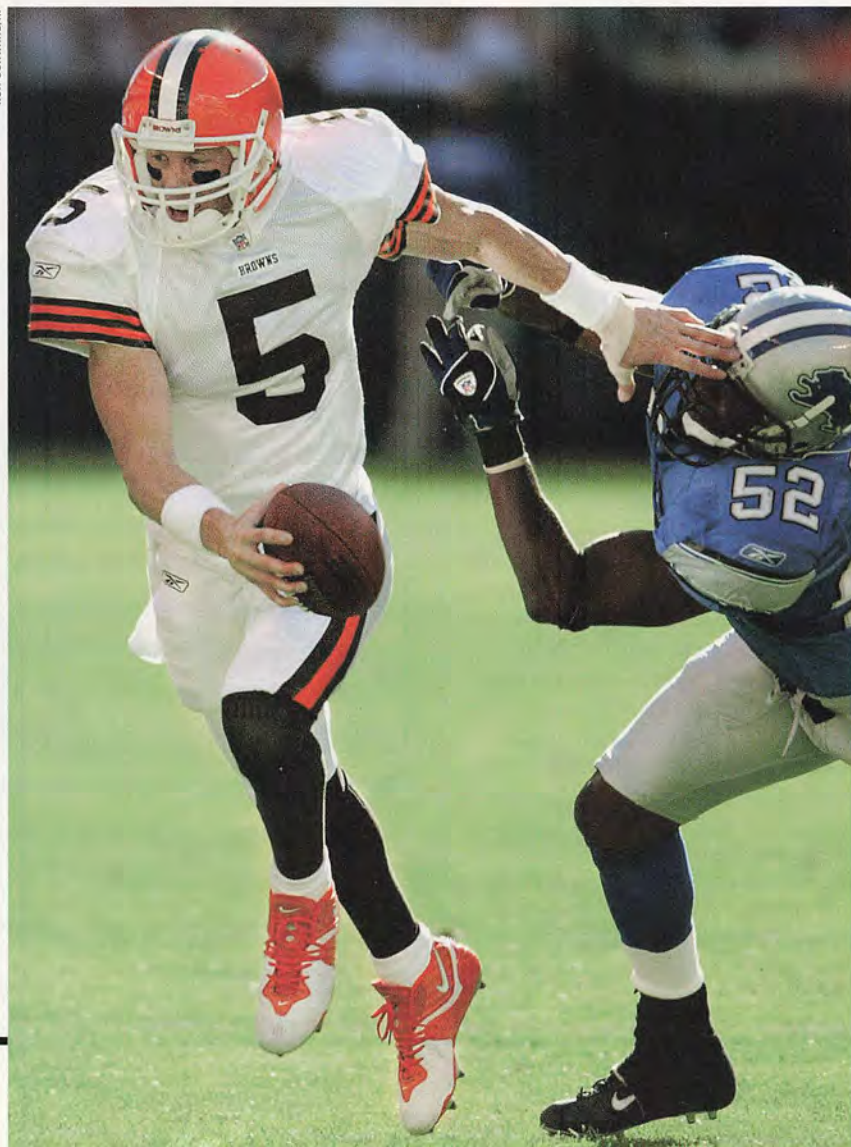
better fit for blue-collar Cleveland than the country boy Couch was, but he also sheds the burden of following in the footsteps of Steve Young and Joe Montana in San Francisco. "The main thing is that people are thankful and excited to have

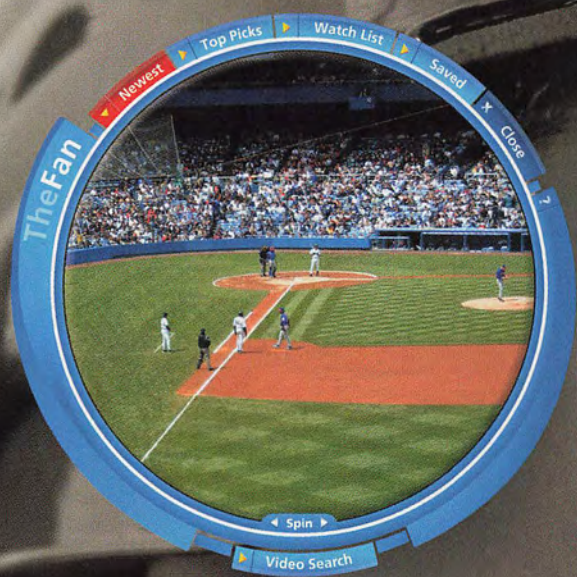
MAN IN MOTION The Browns' offensive line will have to get used to the mobile Garcia, who throws better on the run.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> As a second-year player in 2003, linebacker **ANDRA DAVIS** was made a starter, played almost every down and led the team with 136 tackles, including five sacks. A bit undersized at 6' 1", 255 pounds, he uses quickness and hustle to cover a lot of ground and has Pro Bowl potential. In an inexperienced linebacker corps, he'll be the rock this year.

RON SCHWANEAP





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me here," says Garcia, who signed a four-year, \$25 million contract. "Within two weeks of signing, I moved to Cleveland. I didn't want to linger in the Bay Area. I wanted to acclimate myself as soon as possible."

Almost immediately Garcia became a vocal team leader. When tight end Kellen Winslow Jr., the Browns' first-round draft choice in April, missed the first 12 days of camp before agreeing to a contract, Garcia publicly called for him to get into camp. In practices the quarterback didn't hesitate to get on players who were slacking. He talked to the receivers—on and off the field—about routes and where they liked the ball. "You have to be alert at all times [for Garcia's passes]," says wideout Quincy Morgan. "Not taking anything away from the last few quarterbacks, but Jeff's going to throw it to you if you're open, and he's not afraid to take a shot if he sees you break coverage."

Garcia's prime target figures to be Winslow, who quickly proved to be a hot-head and a gifted player. In his first week with the team Winslow threw a punch in a preseason game (he was flagged for a personal foul), leveled Cleveland cornerback Roosevelt Williams after making a catch in a no-contact drill, questioned the desire of his teammates in the media and consistently beat Browns defensive backs on deep balls. "A monster, an absolute monster," says wideout Dennis Northcutt, shaking his head.

"The complete package," says Garcia. "We want to get the ball to Kellen because he can create separation."

Davis and new offensive coordinator Terry Robiskie plan to employ a power running game, a risky proposition when a team has no power runners. Cleveland hasn't produced a 1,000-yard running back since 1985, the longest such drought in the league, and it's unlikely that either third-year back William Green or second-year man Lee Suggs will break that barrier. The passing game will be tailored to Garcia's skills—escaping the pocket, throwing on the run and going with mostly short routes. He has never been a threat to throw deep.

"As much as I need to adjust to this offense, they need to adjust to me," says Garcia. "We need to find a middle ground. If we can do that, I think we can be dangerous."

—C.B.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

I think getting **Jeff Garcia** will be a good thing in the short term. He is a tough competitor, which this team hasn't had at that position for the last few years. . . . **William Green** hasn't stepped up the way they wanted him to. **Lee Suggs** looked O.K. during the preseason, but they can't be happy that Green didn't take hold of that job. . . . The line will be a strength for them. They have a very good tackle in **Ross Verba**, a potentially great tackle in **Ryan Tucker** and a solid anchor in center **Jeff Faine**. Their pass blocking still needs work. . . . They need **Andre Davis** or **Quincy Morgan** to step up as the No. 1 wide receiver. Garcia will need a target other than **Kellen Winslow**. He'll be too athletic for most linebackers to cover, and he'll force teams to put a corner or safety on him. . . . Their defensive line has to be better. **Courtney Brown** and **Gerard Warren** still haven't shown that they can consistently dominate. . . . Their linebackers are average. **Warrick Holdman** needs to make an impact. . . . **Robert Griffith** is a veteran presence, but you have to wonder how much he has left.

VERBA



“ They need Andre Davis or Quincy Morgan to step up as the No. 1 wide receiver. ”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 20/25/26

DEFENSE 23/7/15

COACH: Butch Davis;
fourth season with
Cleveland (21-27 in NFL)

LEE SUGGS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	53	56	289	5.2
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
2	0	0.0	2	

JEFF GARCIA

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	97	392	225	57.4
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,704	18	13	80.1	

TERRELLE SMITH

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	323	0	0	—
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
6	28	4.7	0	

PHIL DAWSON

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	229	20	21
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
18	21	74	

NEW ACQUISITION

(R) Rookie (stats for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2002 college stats

OFFENSE

QUINCY MORGAN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	104	38	516	3

KELLEN WINSLOW JR. (R)

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	45	60	605	1

ROSS VERBA

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	308	0	0

KELVIN GARMON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 2"	350	16	16

JEFF FAINE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	303	9	9

PAUL ZUKAUSKAS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	320	12	10

RYAN TUCKER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	325	16	16

DENNIS NORTHCUTT

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	161	62	729	2

DEFENSE

CHAUN THOMPSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	4	0	0

KENARD LANG

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	60	8	

ORPHEUS ROYE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	57	1½	

ANDRA DAVIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	136	5	0

GERARD WARREN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	32	5½	

COURTNEY BROWN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	38	6	

WARRICK HOLDMAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	71	0	0

DERRICK FROST*

POS.	POINTS	AVG.
P	49	43.9

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 BALTIMORE
19 at Dallas
26 at N.Y. Giants

OCTOBER

3 WASHINGTON
10 at Pittsburgh
17 CINCINNATI
24 PHILADELPHIA
31 Open date

NOVEMBER

7 at Baltimore
14 PITTSBURGH
21 N.Y. JETS
28 at Cincinnati

DECEMBER

5 NEW ENGLAND
12 at Buffalo
19 SAN DIEGO
26 at Miami

JANUARY

2 at Houston

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-26 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .484 Games against playoff teams: 5

TENNESSEE TITANS

A pair of franchise cornerstones are gone, but nobody's pushing the panic button—not with league co-MVP Steve McNair running the show

THE QUESTION is barely out, and coach Jeff Fisher is already smiling knowingly. He has heard the query too many times to count: How can the Titans expect to get back to the playoffs after having to pare nearly \$18 million off their salary cap and losing a pair of franchise cornerstones in running back Eddie George and defensive end Jevon Kearse (not to mention emerging wideout Justin McCareins and tight end Frank Wycheck, who retired)?

"With all due respect to those guys, especially Eddie, who's like my son, and Jevon, who's great," Fisher says, "we really like the guys we have here. If people think we're down, that's fine. Because we know we're not."

After a 12–4 season that ended with a 17–14 loss to the Patriots in the AFC divisional playoffs, Tennessee faced a daunting task. So rather than waiting another year to

address their cap dilemma and overpaying to retain underproductive stars, the Titans let free agent Kearse (only 11½ sacks over the last two seasons) sign a megadeal with the Eagles; reduced a glut at the No. 2 receiver spot by trading McCareins to the Jets for a second-round draft pick; and, with second-year man Chris Brown in the wings, released George after he and the team could not come to terms on a renegotiated contract. (George signed a one-year deal with the Cowboys.)

While Tennessee coaches and players

speak the names of the departed in hushed tones, pardon them if they're not singing a sad song in Music City. It is the team's belief that quarterback Steve McNair, the league's co-MVP last season, is the only star this team needs to reach the playoffs for the fifth time in six seasons. "It was tough to see Eddie go, because he's, well . . . he's *Eddie George*, you know?" Brown says. "I'm not replacing

Eddie. That's not possible. But I'm excited to get as many touches as I can."

Faster and more athletic than George, the 23-year-old Brown brings an explosiveness to the Titans' backfield that has been missing for years. Though Brown sat

DUAL THREAT The Titans like Brown's running style, and they'll use the second-year back often in the passing game too.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> When safety **LAMONT THOMPSON** walked into Jeff Fisher's office before last season, the coach quickly got to the point. "I told him that if he didn't make it here, he was finished [in the NFL]," recalls Fisher. Thompson earned playing time in the postseason as the nickel corner. This year he could displace Lance Schulters at free safety.

GRANT HALVERSON/GETTY IMAGES



out the first five games of last season with a pulled right hamstring, he had, by year's end, surpassed the declining George. Fisher believes Brown hits the hole more quickly and catches the ball better than George did in 2003, when the then 30-year-old veteran rushed for 1,031 yards but averaged only 3.3 yards a carry and scored five touchdowns. "With Chris we can do a lot more with our running game," Fisher says. "He hits the line so quickly, but he can also bounce outside. Plus, Steve will find him out of the backfield, and that's something we haven't done much of."

While the running game should be revitalized, McNair's arm will still drive the offense. His best wide receiver, Derrick Mason, is coming off three consecutive 1,000-yard seasons, and Drew Bennett takes over the No. 2 role that he and McCareins shared a year ago. Bennett says he has gotten over the heartbreaking loss in New England last January, a defeat particularly painful for the fifth-year wideout who, after making two circus catches in the Titans' final drive, dropped a catchable McNair fourth-down heave that would have put Tennessee within field goal range. To clear his head, last February, Bennett joined a group of friends in Rio de Janeiro for a three-week vacation. "I needed that break, but I wasn't doing much while I was there," he says. "Two weeks in, I tried to do a beach run, and after 100 yards I almost died. So when I got back, I worked harder than I ever have. It's amazing what a good alarm clock one dropped pass can be." The Titans are hopeful that second-year wideout Tyrone Calico, a 4.3 burner with questionable route-running skills, can replace McCareins as a deep threat.

Defensively Tennessee will miss Kears, its most dynamic playmaker when he was healthy (as well as tackle Robaire Smith, who left for the Texans in free agency), but the coaching staff is bullish on right end Carlos Hall (11 sacks as a fill-in over the last two seasons) and on the prospect of veteran Kevin Carter's move from left end to left tackle.

So if Brown lives up to expectations and the defensive line jells and, most important, if the injury-prone McNair stays relatively healthy, the Titans will contend with the Colts for the AFC South crown. That's a lot of ifs, but then there's a reason Fisher is smiling. —Josh Elliott

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

They've got a very good system in place. **Jeff Fisher** is a great coach, and **Mike Heimerdinger** is an underrated offensive coordinator. . . . **Steve McNair** doesn't run as much as he used to, but he can make all the throws. If you had to pick your poison, I'd rather face [the Colts'] Peyton Manning than McNair. . . . **Derrick Mason** is as underrated a receiver as there is, and **Tyrone Calico** will be downright scary when he figures out how good he can be. He's big and fast and just needs to catch the ball more consistently. . . . The cornerbacks are the strength of the defense—they use **Samari Rolle** and **Andre Dyson** to press outside and work everything else off them—but they've taken some big hits on the line. They drafted some guys, and I don't think they have any idea how good any of them will be. . . . **Albert Haynesworth** is a talent, but will he go hard every play? He hasn't so far. . . . At linebacker **Keith Bulluck** is a very good player, but I'm not a **Rocky Calmus** fan. He's undersized and isn't strong enough. . . . I see them right there with the Colts; they should make it back to the playoffs.

DYSON



Tyrone Calico will be downright scary when he figures out how good he can be. He's big and fast.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 12-4

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 26/5/8

DEFENSE 1/30/12

COACH: Jeff Fisher; 11th season with Tennessee (89-62 in NFL)

CHRIS BROWN				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	31	95	1,303	8

STEVE MCNAIR				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
QB	13	400	250	62.5
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,215	24	7	100.4	

SHAD MEIER				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	270	13	159	0

JOE NEDNEY				
POS.	PVR	XP%	MADE	XP%
K	173	0	1	1
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.		
1	1	3		

DERRICK MASON				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	31	95	1,303	8

ERRON KINNEY				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	194	41	381	3

BRAD HOPKINS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 3"	305	16	16

ZACH PILLER				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	321	16	16

JUSTIN HARTWIG				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	305	16	16

BENJI OLSON				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	320	16	16

FRED MILLER				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	320	16	16

DREW BENNETT				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	178	32	504	4

KEITH BULLUCK				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	137	3	2	

CARLOS HALL				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
RE	37	3		

ALBERT HAYNESWORTH				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
RT	32	2½		

ROCKY CALMUS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
MLB	44	1	2	

KEVIN CARTER				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
LT	48	5½		

ANTWAN ODOM (R)				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
LE	40	8		

ROCKY BOIMAN				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	36	1½	2	

SAMARI ROLLE				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	31		6	

TANK WILLIAMS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
SS	74	½	2	

LANCE SCHULTERS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
FS	85	1	0	

ANDRE DYSON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	65		4	

CRAIG HENTRICH				
POS.	PUNTS	AVG.		
P	71	43.9		

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	12 at Miami	3 at San Diego	7 Open date	5 At Indianapolis	2 DETROIT
	19 INDIANAPOLIS	11 at Green Bay (M)	13 CHICAGO	13 KANSAS CITY (M)	
	26 JACKSONVILLE	17 HOUSTON	21 at Jacksonville	19 at Oakland	
		24 at Minnesota	28 at Houston	25 DENVER (S)	
		31 CINCINNATI			

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-26** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.484** Games against playoff teams: **7**

2 INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

There's a youth movement afoot in the secondary as Tony Dungy tinkers with a unit that learned a lesson from the Patriots last year

AS THE PATRIOTS' defensive backs snuffed the Colts' Super Bowl dreams in the AFC Championship Game last January, the members of the Indianapolis secondary could only watch—and admire. Coming into the game, the Colts had torched the Broncos and the Chiefs for a total of 79 points with an offense that appeared to be unstoppable: Peyton Manning had thrown for 681 yards and eight touchdowns. The Colts had yet to punt.

Then the Patriots' bruising, big-play pass defenders crashed the party, imposing their will on the Indianapolis receivers while picking off Manning four times in a 24-14 win. "What those guys did that day was impressive," cornerback Nick Harper recalls. "But it hurt, because this team was good enough to win it all. We need to force more turnovers, make quarterbacks adjust to us. When the young guys get comfortable in the defense, we'll be fine."

lief in the simplicity of his Cover 2 scheme: It's so easy, anyone can execute it, especially with speedy young legs.

Ever the optimist, Dungy seems unfazed by the shakeup. "I like the kids," he says. "They have more of a tendency to believe what you're saying. Our young guys have done everything we've asked. We need more big plays, and it'll be the young guys who make that happen."

Passing for the group's wizened sage is Harper, 29, who began his pro career with the CFL's Hamilton Tiger-Cats. A year patrolling the CFL's wider field and deeper end zones was well spent; Harper honed his ability to close on a receiver, a must in

FAST BREAK Already a big hitter, Doss figures to get to the ball quicker after working on his speed in the off-season.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> As a rookie first-round draft pick out of Iowa last year, **DALLAS CLARK** had just carved a niche in offensive coordinator Tom Moore's tight-end-friendly scheme when a broken leg in late November ended his season. Fully healed, Clark remains the rare tight end who's a safety valve and a deep threat. He looked impressive in camp, particularly in goal line situations.

The young guys—second-year cornerback Donald Strickland, second-year safety Mike Doss and fourth-year free safety Idrees Bashir—are getting their chance. Going with potential over experience, Indianapolis released eight-year corner Walt Harris and chose not to re-sign fellow starting corner David Macklin. Reshaping the NFL's fifth-ranked pass defense is a gamble, but it's a bet defensive-minded coach Tony Dungy is willing to make, based on his be-

JOE ROBBINS



Dungy's scheme. "They say the sideline and the end zones are a corner's best friends, but not up there," Harper says. "In the CFL you have to have the speed to recover or you're done. It made me a better player."

He signed with Indianapolis as a free agent in 2001 and broke through last season with four interceptions. But as a team the Colts managed only 15 interceptions, 14th best in the league. "I'm fired up," Harper says, "but now I've got to produce like a Number 1." Harper looked impressive in camp, as did Strickland, a speedster out of Colorado who started eight games as a rookie. Third-year nickel corner Joseph Jefferson will also see significant playing time.

After arriving from Ohio State with a reputation as a devastating hitter, Doss had a solid rookie season, but he appeared a step slow and uncomfortable at times in coverage. So he spent the off-season working out at the speed camp of fellow Buckeye alum Cris Carter. "I can definitely feel the difference," says Doss, who picked off one pass last season. "I want to be more of a ball hawk. I want more turnovers. I knew I had to get better. I think I did."

If the offense gets any better, the defense shouldn't be under as much pressure to produce. A year ago Manning, the league's co-MVP, threw for 4,267 yards and 29 touchdowns and completed a career-high 67% of his passes. All-Pro wideout Marvin Harrison fell short of 100 catches for the first time in five years but only because of the emergence of No. 2 receiver Reggie Wayne and the late-season surge of Brandon Stokley, who had 11 catches for 223 yards and three touchdowns in the postseason. The rushing attack also figures to improve, with both Edgerrin James and backup Dominic Rhodes another year removed from the ACL surgeries that sidelined them in 2001 and '02, respectively.

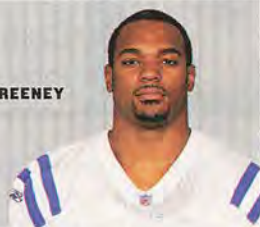
Such offensive potency makes Indianapolis as dangerous as any team in the league. But the Colts don't have the luxury of patience, not after signing Manning to a \$98 million contract in the off-season, complete with a \$34.5 million signing bonus. The deal will make re-signing both Harrison and James exceedingly difficult when their contracts expire after this year. The time is now for that trio of Colts. If only it were all up to them.

—J.E.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

Winning a playoff game on the road [in Kansas City] last season was a huge boost to their confidence. That gives them an edge heading into the season. . . . **Peyton Manning** runs that offense with total efficiency. As long as he stays healthy and keeps getting rid of the ball so quickly, he'll only improve. . . . What's impressive is how in sync Manning and **Marvin Harrison** are. They make it look easy. . . . **Edgerrin James** got better as last season went on, but he's not the player he was. . . . The Colts' problem is that the offense has to carry the team. They have to put so much pressure on the opponent, through time of possession and scoring points, that they make the other team alter its game plan. . . . Defensively, I don't know how they do it. Must be with mirrors. They run lots of stunts, but that makes them vulnerable to the run. . . . **Dwight Freeney** is a one-man wrecking crew, but they need someone else to step up. I don't know who will. . . . The secondary is average, and the Colts must think so too, because they keep going through players. . . . They're still my favorite in the division.

FREENEY



Freeney is a one-man wrecking crew, but they need somebody else to step up. I don't know who.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 12-4
NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 19/1/3
DEFENSE T-20/5/11

COACH: Tony Dungy, third season with Indianapolis (76-52 in NFL)

EDGERRIN JAMES					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
RB	6	310	1,259	4.1	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
51	292	5.7	11		

PEYTON MANNING					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%	
QB	9	566	379	67.0	
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING		
4,267	29	10	99.0		

DALLAS CLARK					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
TE	185	29	340	1	

MIKE VANDERJAGT					
POS.	PVR	XPts MADE	XPts ATT.		
K	96	46	46		
FG MADE	FG ATT.	Pts.			
37	37	157			

OFFENSE					
MARVIN HARRISON					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	15	94	1,272	10	
MARCUS POLLARD					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
TE	63	40	541	3	

TARIK GLENN					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LT	6' 5"	332	10	10	

RICK DEMULLING					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LG	6' 4"	304	16	16	

JEFF SATURDAY					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
C	6' 2"	291	16	16	

TUPE PEKO					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RG	6' 4"	305	16	1	

RYAN DIEM					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RT	6' 6"	331	13	13	

REGGIE WAYNE					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	78	68	838	7	

DEFENSE					
CATO JUNE					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	1	0	0		
DWIGHT FREENEY					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
RE	32	11			

LARRY TRIPPLETT					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
RT	47	1			

ROB MORRIS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
MLB	83	0	0		

MONTAE REAGOR					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
LT	26	1/2			

RAHEEM BROCK					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
LE	37	2			

DAVID THORNTON					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	140	1	2		

DONALD STRICKLAND					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
CB	36	2			

MIKE DOSS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
SS	97	0	1		

IDREES BASHIR					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
FS	43	0	2		

NICK HARPER					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
CB	95	4			

HUNTER SMITH					
POS.	PTS.	AVG.			
P	62	42.2			

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	9 at New England (T) 19 at Tennessee 26 GREEN BAY	3 at Jacksonville 10 OAKLAND 17 Open date 24 JACKSONVILLE 31 at Kansas City	8 MINNESOTA (M) 14 HOUSTON 21 at Chicago 25 at Detroit (T)	5 TENNESSEE 12 at Houston 19 BALTIMORE 26 SAN DIEGO	2 at Denver (M) MONDAY (T) THURSDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-16** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.508** Games against playoff teams: **6**

3 JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

Comfortable as a drop-back passer and slimmed down, Byron Leftwich looks to pick up where he left off last year for this dark-horse contender

AS HE left the field following the Jaguars' 21-14 loss in Atlanta on Dec. 28, Byron Leftwich was visibly upset that his rookie season had come to an end. It wasn't the loss or Jacksonville's 5-11 record that ate at him. It was the feeling that after a 1-7 start, he and the Jaguars were just turning a corner when the schedule ran out. They had won four of their last eight games, a youthful defensive front seven had thrown up a brick wall, running back Fred Taylor had rushed for a team-record 1,572 yards, and Leftwich himself had shown flashes of brilliance after taking over for Mark Brunell in Week 4. The seventh pick in the 2003 draft, Leftwich finished with 2,819 passing yards and 14 touchdowns in 13 starts.

For all his poise and savvy, the 24-year-old Leftwich was like a kid in a batting cage who had run out of tokens just when

north Florida rest largely on the shoulders of Leftwich, and after an off-season spent toning his body and honing his skills, he is the team's unquestioned leader. "To replace the only quarterback this franchise had known wasn't easy, and Byron handled it great," says second-year coach Jack Del Rio. "We'd hoped to groom him for a year, but Mark's injury [a gash on his passing elbow that required stitches] forced our hand."

Leftwich took over at a time when he was still developing into a drop-back passer. At Marshall, Leftwich had operated almost exclusively out of the shotgun. The Jaguars, however, employ a power-running game with almost no use for a shotgun

FIELDWORK Though he started 13 games as a rookie, former shotgunner Leftwich struggled with his reads until late in '03.

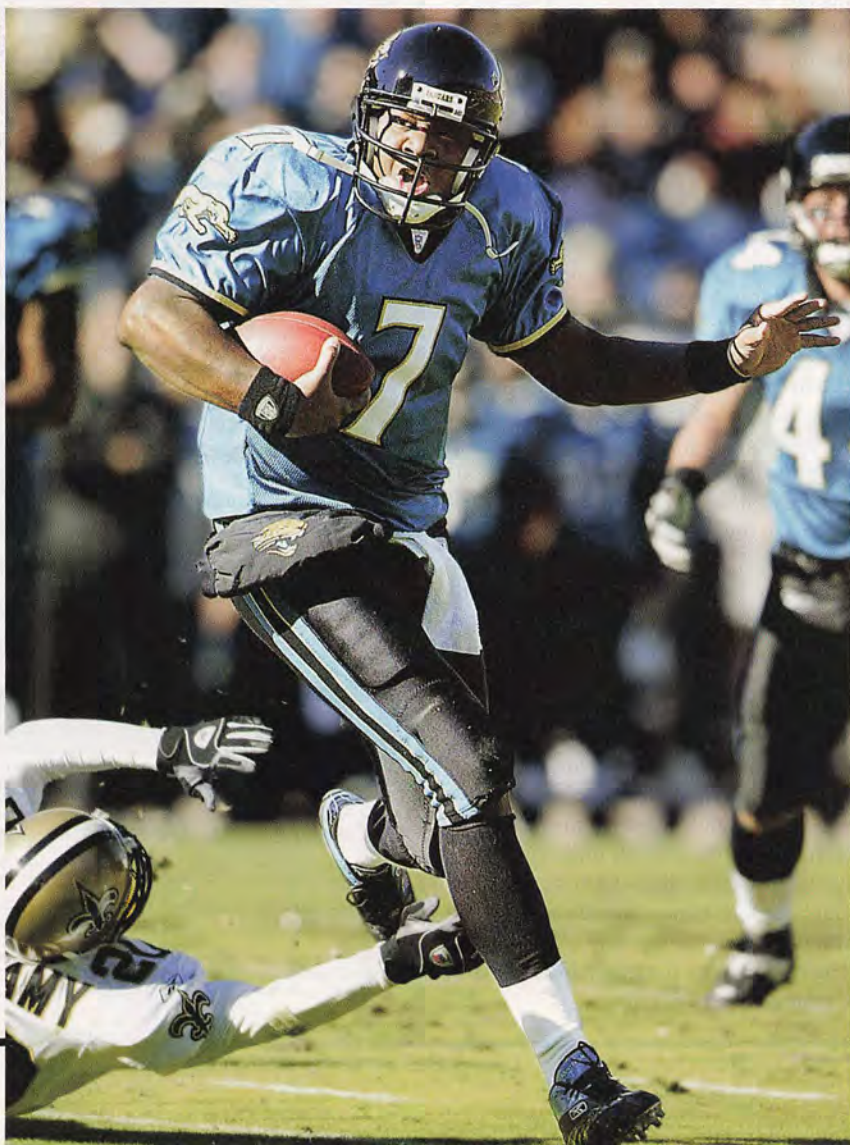
PLAYER ON THE RISE

> It's hard to believe that 6' 7", 328-pound **JOHN HENDERSON** could be overlooked, but such was the case last season when fellow defensive tackle Marcus Stroud was voted into the Pro Bowl. Still, Henderson is just as deserving of mention among the league's best at his position. He is a powerful two-gap run-stopper who regularly occupies two blockers.

he had found his rhythm. "The Atlanta game was the first time I saw the whole field," he says, still shaking his head at the memory. "That was the moment where I was like, *I get this now*. The team had so many good things happen in the second half of the season, I was just happy to be a part of it. Now that people are behind us, we can't shrink from [the raised expectations]."

Indeed, the Jaguars' late-season showing has several pundits making them the dark-horse pick in the AFC South. The hopes of

TOM DIPACE



formation, so Leftwich had to learn to make his reads while stepping away from under center. "To learn how to drop back and read defenses on this level is really difficult," says offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave, a former NFL quarterback. "Some guys never learn it. For Byron to learn it on the fly was incredible."

"At first I was struggling to see my receivers, to see what the defense was giving me," Leftwich says. "But as the season went on, the field opened up."

The other thing he discovered as a rookie was that he had to get serious about his fitness. During the off-season Leftwich changed his diet (forgoing "pretty much everything I ate before," he says. "If it tastes good, I'm no longer eating it") and sleeping habits (the self-professed night owl upped his rest from between four and six hours to eight). By the time he reported to camp this summer, he was better prepared for the rigors of the NFL, which had "caught me by surprise," he says. "I'd never been that tired." To improve his stamina, he increased his number of lifting sessions and added a daily battery of footwork drills. The result? Leftwich arrived in camp about 15 pounds lighter than his listed weight of 245.

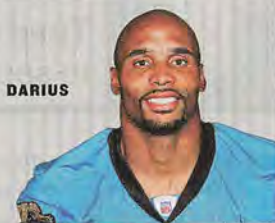
With Leftwich on the fast track—Brunell was traded to the Redskins in March—Jacksonville needs the defensive line to develop similarly. Anchored by tackles John Henderson and Marcus Stroud, the unit was most responsible for the Jaguars' holding opponents to a league-low 3.2 yards per carry in 2003. But the release during the preseason of last year's starting ends, Tony Brackens and Hugh Douglas, means an untested linebacker corps and a suspect secondary will be under even more pressure. Rob Meier and Paul Spicer, a pair of fifth-year players with a combined 16 career starts and 11 sacks, are the new starters at end. They'll be entrusted with helping improve a pass rush that produced just 24 sacks a year ago.

No wonder Del Rio laughs off predictions that his team will be the first to play in a Super Bowl in its hometown—the Feb. 6 championship game will be held in Alltel Stadium. "To talk about a Super Bowl...," he says, not bothering to finish the thought. "Look, we haven't had a winning season since 1999. How about a little perspective, you know?" —J.E.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

I hear all the prognosticators putting these guys deep into the playoffs. I don't buy it, but I do think they're heading upward. . . . Defensively, they're not as good as they're perceived. The two tackles [Marcus Stroud and John Henderson] are tough, but they can be inconsistent. . . . The linebackers are average, though Mike Peterson looks good. . . . [Former Panther] Deon Grant has no instincts, and that showed in the Super Bowl. Donovan Darius is an impact player, but I don't know why people can't throw on these guys. . . . Offensively, their line will be improved. I like Brad Meester at center. From what I've seen on film, I like his attitude. But there are still questions: Fred Taylor makes them go, but will he stay healthy? Byron Leftwich is a good young quarterback, but is he athletic enough? . . . At receiver, how much does Jimmy Smith have left at 35? And Reggie Williams wasn't worth the ninth pick in the draft. His hands are just O.K., and he's not fast enough. . . . [Special teams coach] Pete Rodriguez was their biggest signing. He'll help them immensely. But they're still not a playoff team.

DARIUS



“Donovin Darius is an impact player, but I don't know why people can't throw on these guys.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 8/15/12

DEFENSE 2/18/6

COACH: Jack Del Rio;
second season with
Jacksonville (5-11 in NFL)

FRED TAYLOR

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	20	345	1,572	4.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
48	370	7.7	7	

BYRON LEFTWICH

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMB.	%
QB	121	418	239	57.2
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,819	14	16	73.0	

MARC EDWARDS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	308	7	13	1.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
31	226	7.3	1	

JOSH SCOBEE (R)

POS.	PVR	XPts MADE	XPts ATT.
K	366	31	31
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
21	31	94	

OFFENSE

JIMMY SMITH

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	71	54	805	4

KYLE BRADY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	250	29	281	1

MIKE PEARSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMG.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	297	16	16

VINCE MANUWAI

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMG.	STARTS
LG	6' 2"	312	15	14

BRAD MEESTER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMG.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	300	16	16

CHRIS NAEOLE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMG.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	317	16	16

MAURICE WILLIAMS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	CMG.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	310	16	16

REGGIE WILLIAMS (R)

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	180	89	1,109	8

DEFENSE

AKIN AYODELE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	113	1	2

ROB MEIER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	25	1½	

JOHN HENDERSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	58	3½	

MIKE PETERSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	102	1	3

MARCUS STROUD

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	65	4½	

PAUL SPICER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	32	0	

TOMMY HENDRICKS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	23	0	0

DEWAYNE WASHINGTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	55	1	

DONOVIN DARIUS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	82	0	1

DEON GRANT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	77	1	3

RASHEAN MATHIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	78	2	

CHRIS HANSON

POS.	PTS.	AVG.
P	23	43.5

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at Buffalo
19 DENVER
26 at Tennessee

OCTOBER

3 INDIANAPOLIS
10 at San Diego
17 KANSAS CITY
24 at Indianapolis
31 at Houston

NOVEMBER

7 Open date
14 DETROIT
21 TENNESSEE
28 at Minnesota

DECEMBER

5 PITTSBURGH
12 CHICAGO
19 at Green Bay
26 HOUSTON

JANUARY

2 at Oakland

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-7 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .512 Games against playoff teams: 7

4 HOUSTON TEXANS

Tired of being labeled with the E word, the newest franchise only wants to see expansion in the win column—and a revamped defense is the key

AFTER HE was torched for a long touchdown by wideout Andre Johnson early in training camp, rookie cornerback Dunta Robinson had to suffer through a tongue-lashing from secondary coach Jon Hoke. Veteran corner Aaron Glenn couldn't have been happier as he watched Robinson slouch back to the defensive huddle. "Right then Dunta [pronounced DON-tay] showed me all I needed to see," Glenn recalls. "He's got the character and the mental strength to learn from his mistakes. He'll make his share, so you hope he's mature enough to deal with the criticism. Well, it turns out he's a perfectionist. He's the kind of player we need if we're going to stop thinking of ourselves as an *expansion* team."

Mention the E word in conversation with any coach, player, p.r. staffer or night janitor associated with the third-year franchise, and a rebuke—"That's not O.K. anymore"—is swift and unyielding. After going 4-12 and then 5-11 in their first two seasons, the Texans are determined to measure success in actual, rather than moral, victories.

While last year's record was a slight improvement on the inaugural season, there was a lot of heartbreak from so many near misses. Five losses were by a touchdown or less, with four of those defeats coming on the opponents' final drive. Indeed, Houston's season was the

flip side of the NFC champion Panthers'—winners of four overtime games—a fact not lost on Texans coach Dom Capers, who also was the Carolina franchise's first coach (1995 through '98). "If Carolina doesn't win those games, they probably don't make the playoffs," Capers says. "There's such a fine line between winning and losing in this game. Now we have to make that final push."

Houston couldn't do it last year largely because of a defense that had the dubious distinction of ranking 31st in the league in passing, rushing and total defense. As a result, the unit has new faces at five positions, including a pair of

COVER STORY Robinson (23) is one of two rookies who should help shore up a defense that ranked 31st in the league.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> A lightly regarded fourth-round draft pick who was thought to be little more than a third-down back, **DOMANICK DAVIS** started 10 games last season and rushed for 1,031 yards. The 5' 9", 216-pound Davis is a bruising runner between the tackles, and he should only improve behind a mammoth line. In fact, Davis has predicted a 2,000-yard season in 2004.

RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES



rookie first-round draft choices: Robinson, the 10th pick out of South Carolina, and outside linebacker Jason Babin, No. 27, from Western Michigan. Robinson is a fleet (4.3 in the 40), aggressive cover man who despite his lack of size (5' 10", 174 pounds) was known as a bruising tackler in college. "He wants to do more than just get by," says Hoke. "He won't let something go until he's perfected it. In college he got by on pure athleticism; here he's had to focus on little things in his technique. But with his work ethic, that's not a problem."

The arrival of Robinson allowed the Texans to move rangy, athletic Marcus Coleman from cornerback to free safety, shoring up what has been a glaring weakness. An improved secondary will give the front seven the opportunity to attack the quarterback more than they did last season, when Houston had a meager 19 sacks (second-fewest in the NFL). The 6' 2", 260-pound Babin, who had 30 sacks in his final two college seasons combined, has impressed the staff with his quickness and instincts. (Capers likens him to a young Kevin Greene.) The line should also be much improved with the return of left end Gary Walker and nosetackle Seth Payne—who together missed 26 games in '03 because of injuries—and the addition of free-agent Robaire Smith, a tackle for four years with the Titans who will move to right end in Houston's 3-4 alignment.

Offensively, there's good news for a unit that ranked—what else?—31st in the league last year: For the first time there won't be a rookie in the starting lineup. Though he missed five starts with a strained throwing shoulder, quarterback David Carr finished 2003 with 2,013 passing yards and nine touchdown tosses. More important, he developed a rapport with Johnson, and that tandem was clicking again from the start of camp, with Johnson showing that he has improved in running his routes. "Finally," says Capers, "our offense will be expected to win some games for us."

Winning enough games to be a contender for the playoffs in the stacked AFC South is unlikely. But after a season of falling short so many times, expect the Texans to at least win their share of close games. Then they can shed that dreaded E word once and for all.

—J.E.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

By signing veteran defenders in the off-season, they bought time for **David Carr** to develop. You get the sense there's a plan in place. Carr is a big, strong kid, bright and gifted, but I'm not sure he's got the gut feel you need to be great. He's rote, too mechanical. . . . **Domanick Davis** is O.K., but how many of his yards last year came because teams just weren't going to let Houston beat them deep? . . . **Andre Johnson** is the real deal. He's physical and can run like hell, and I think his concentration lapses will be few and far between. . . . The offensive line is huge and should be solid. I like the move of **Chester Pitts** from tackle to guard. . . . They're spending a lot of money on the defensive line, but the line in their 3-4 just doesn't make that many big plays. . . . Their rush should be improved with **Jason Babin**, but I wonder how effective he'll be in space and in coverage. I know a lot of teams saw him only as a defensive end coming out—and an undersized one at that. . . . I like their secondary. Moving **Marcus Coleman** from cornerback to safety will be a bit of an experiment, but his athleticism and smarts will help him a lot.

JOHNSON



“Carr is gifted, but I'm not sure he has the gut feel you need to be great. He's rote, too mechanical.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 23/29/31

DEFENSE 31/31/31

COACH: Dom Capers;
third season with
Houston (39-57 in NFL)

DOMANICK DAVIS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	41	238	1,031	4.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
47	351	7.5	8	

DAVID CARR

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	120	295	167	56.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	HATING	
2,013	9	13	69.5	

MORAN NORRIS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	361	0	0	—
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
7	40	5.7	0	

KRIS BROWN

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	230	27	27
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PFS.	
18	22	81	

OFFENSE

ANDRE JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	70	66	976	4

MARK BRUENER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	330	2	12	1

SETH WAND

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	327	16	2

CHESTER PITTS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	320	16	16

STEVE MCKINNEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	302	16	16

ZACH WIEGERT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	309	15	14

TODD WADE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 8"	315	16	16

COREY BRADFORD

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	179	24	460	4

DEFENSE

KAILEE WONG

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	62	3	0

JAMIE SHARPER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
ILB	166	4	

ROBAIRE SMITH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	35	4½	

SETH PAYNE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
NT	9	1	

GARY WALKER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	13	0	

JAY FOREMAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
ILB	136	2	

JASON BABIN (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	115	15	0

DUNTA ROBINSON (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	50	1	

ERIC BROWN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	92	½	1

MARCUS COLEMAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	69	0	7

AARON GLENN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	35	1	

CHAD STANLEY

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	97	41.5

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 SAN DIEGO
19 at Detroit
26 at Kansas City

OCTOBER

3 OAKLAND
10 MINNESOTA
17 at Tennessee
24 Open date
31 JACKSONVILLE

NOVEMBER

7 at Denver
14 at Indianapolis
21 GREEN BAY
28 TENNESSEE

DECEMBER

5 at N.Y. Jets
12 INDIANAPOLIS
19 at Chicago
26 at Jacksonville

JANUARY

2 CLEVELAND

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-7 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .512 Games against playoff teams: 7

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

The old defensive coordinator has been succeeded by the old head coach, but will that be enough to fix a unit that was embarrassing a year ago?

IN THEIR last five games of 2003 the Chiefs faced three of the league's top 10 offenses—the Broncos; the Vikings; and, in the playoffs, the Colts. Kansas City's defense in those games was abominable, giving up 45, 45 and 38 points, respectively. The three teams combined to complete 71% of their passes and averaged 6.2 yards per carry. Perhaps the biggest embarrassment came in the AFC divisional playoff loss; in that game the Colts never punted, and when the Chiefs were down by 14 and facing a fourth-and-six at their own 41 with 8:26 left, coach Dick Vermeil decided to go for it, fearful that his offense wouldn't see the ball again or would be 21 points down if he punted.

In the off-season, however, the Chiefs made no major personnel changes on a defense that ranked 29th in the league last season. "I don't see it as a huge risk, but time will tell," Vermeil says. "I truly believe we have more talent on this defense than the defense we won the Super Bowl with in St. Louis a few years ago. I'm sure that these players are better than they've shown."

He also knows what new defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham can do. In one of the most eye-opening moves of the off-season, Cunningham returns to the team he worked for from 1995 through 2000, the first four years as coordinator, the last two as head coach. The fiery, attack-minded Cunningham

replaces Greg Robinson, who preferred a reacting, gap-control scheme.

The marquee player on defense is left end Eric Hicks. In his first tour with the Chiefs, Cunningham turned the 6' 6", 280-pound Hicks into an edge pass rusher on obvious passing downs, but he is big enough to tangle with offensive tackles on running plays. In 2000 Hicks had 14 sacks in 13 games. Under Robinson he rushed

less and spent more time plugging gaps. In 48 games over the past three years, he had 17½ sacks. "My confidence is soaring," Hicks said during camp. "For the first time in years, I'm flying off the ball."

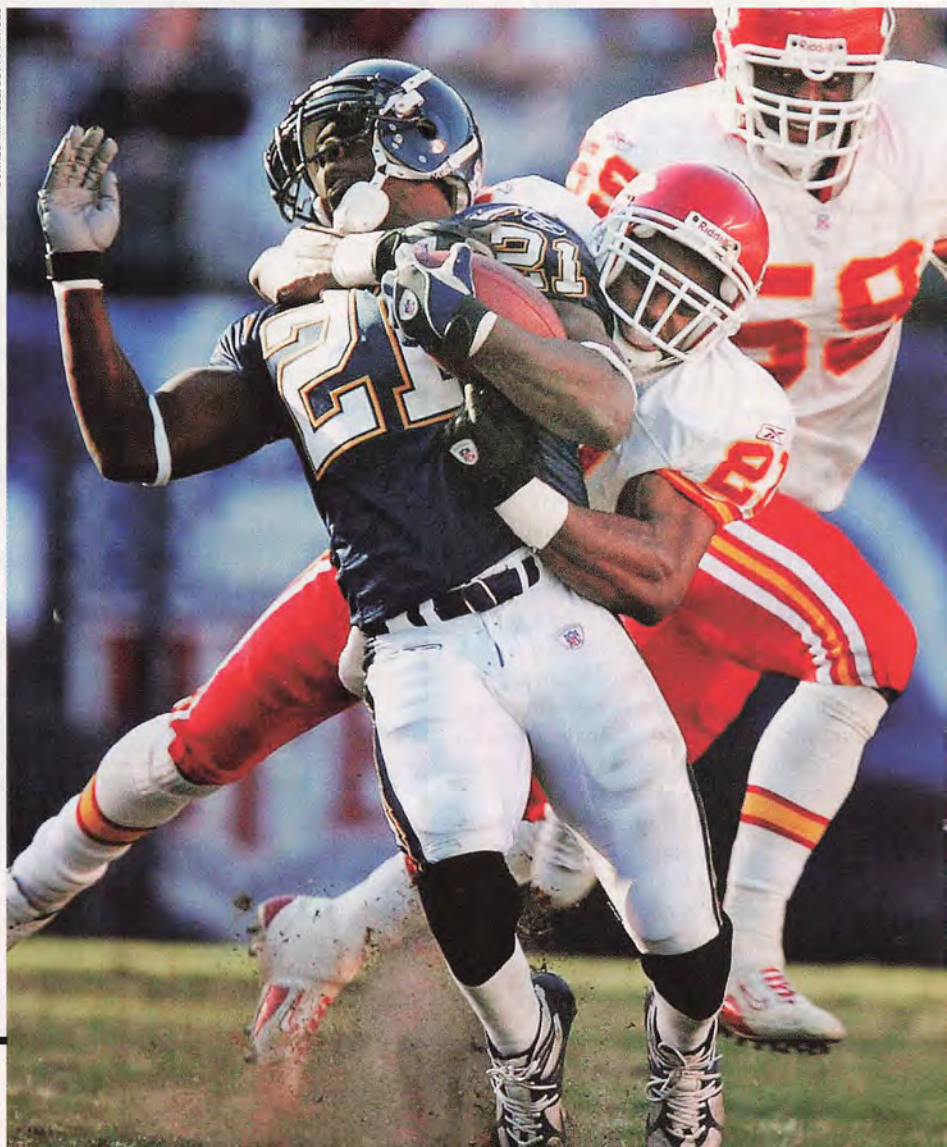
The Chiefs are counting on Hicks to

SAFETY NET Woods made the Pro Bowl last season, but he was one of the few bright spots on the Chiefs' defense.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> The Chiefs drafted the quick, 6' 4", 315-pound **RYAN SIMS** at No. 6 in 2002, hoping he'd be the next Warren Sapp. But he's been neutralized far too easily, with only three sacks in 22 games. New schemes should free the defensive tackle to knife through the line more often, without having the stay-at-home responsibilities he had under former coordinator Greg Robinson.

DONALD MIRALLES/BETTY IMAGES



create havoc in the backfield. "In this system," he says, "you put pressure on the tack-les. That's a system made for me, because I can run. We have linemen who can get into the backfield and disrupt the offense, at end and tackle. The old system didn't [make good use of that]. This one does."

Six starters remain from the unit that ranked 18th in the league in 2000, Cunningham's last as coach. Now we'll see what he can get out of them as an assistant. "We were the laughingstock of the NFL at the end of last season," says safety Jerome Woods, one of the holdovers. "We've got something to prove. Gunther's always been able to bring out the best in all of us, and we think he's going to do it again."

Cunningham, 58, tries to impose his will and his work ethic on his players. In early August, looking weary but highly caffeineated on the fourth afternoon of training camp, he was asked what time he had gotten up that morning. "I haven't slept since we got to camp," said Cunningham, who was linebackers coach with Tennessee for the last three years.

When Vermeil flew to Nashville to talk to Cunningham about returning, he knew it would be awkward to ask the man he replaced to work under him, but he was undeterred. "I didn't come here to interview you for the job," Vermeil told him. "I came here to ask for your help." Cunningham said he'd come. The two hugged. The deal was done.

"You have to understand something," Cunningham says. "When I was growing up in football, coaching in the Pac-10, Dick Vermeil was my hero. So it wasn't a hard decision, even though I had good friends question it because of the way this defense played last year. A good buddy of mine, [Kansas City Royals third baseman] Joe Randa, told me, 'You're nuts.'"

He just might be. In his first stint with the Chiefs, Cunningham had a premier pass rusher, the late Derrick Thomas, and a younger, more promising group. But after ranking second in the league that first year, the defense finished in the top 10 only once in the next five seasons. With Kansas City's high-powered offense capable of scoring points in bunches, Hicks & Co. don't have to be that good. But the defense will have to play better than it did under Robinson if the Chiefs expect to make a Super Bowl push.

—Peter King

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

Trent Green has to be one of the most underrated quarterbacks in recent history. Nobody's scared of any of his receivers, but Green is so smart and so consistent about throwing to the right guy. He never forces the ball. . . . The falloff from John Tait to **John Welbourn** at right tackle won't be major. I love Welbourn's mean and dirty streak. . . . I don't like **Tony Gonzalez** sitting out practices in the summer with a bad foot. That means he's obviously not 100 percent. But they have the best backup tight end in football in **Jason Dunn**. . . . On defense, I don't understand why they didn't make any major personnel changes and why they added a tackle who everyone in the league is sick of, **Lionel Dalton**. He leads the league in wasted chances. . . . The Chiefs are still the best team in the division, but there's no way they'll win I3 again with that defense. Obviously they think it's a scheme problem, not a personnel problem, but I don't see a cornerback on that team who can cover man-to-man. . . . They want to play an attacking scheme, but one of the important men in the middle, **Jerome Woods**, can't run anymore. How can they attack?

WELBOURN



“They’re still the best team in the division, but no way they’ll win I3 again with that defense.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 13-3

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 15/2/2

DEFENSE 30/20/29

COACH: Dick Vermeil;
fourth season with Kansas
City (103-94 in NFL)

PRIEST HOLMES

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	1	320	1,420	4.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
74	690	9.3	27	

TRENT GREEN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	35	523	330	63.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
4,039	24	12	92.6	

TONY RICHARDSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	174	24	60	2.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
12	76	6.3	0	

MORTEN ANDERSEN

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	260	58	59
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
16	20	106	

OFFENSE

EDDIE KENNISON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	169	56	853	5

TONY GONZALEZ

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	18	71	916	10

WILLIE ROAF

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	320	16	16

BRIAN WATERS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	318	16	16

CASEY WIEGMANN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	285	16	16

WILL SHIELDS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	315	16	16

JOHN WELBOURN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	318	13	13

DANTE HALL

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	89	40	423	1

DEFENSE

SHAWN BARBER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	113	5	1

JOHN BROWNING

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	42	1/2	

RYAN SIMS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	39	3	

KAWIKA MITCHELL

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	17	0	1

LIONEL DALTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	14	1	

ERIC HICKS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	49	5	

SCOTT FUJITA

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	114	4	1



DEXTER MCCLEON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	60	6	

GREG WESLEY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	102	2	6

JEROME WOODS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	79	0	3

ERIC WARFIELD

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	66	4	

JASON BAKER

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	80	39.5

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at Denver
19 CAROLINA
26 HOUSTON

OCTOBER

4 at Baltimore (M)
10 Open date
17 at Jacksonville
24 ATLANTA
31 INDIANAPOLIS

NOVEMBER

7 at Tampa Bay
14 at New Orleans
22 NEW ENGLAND (M)
28 SAN DIEGO

DECEMBER

5 at Oakland
13 at Tennessee (M)
19 DENVER
25 OAKLAND (S)

JANUARY

2 at San Diego
(M) MONDAY
(S) SATURDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-23 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .488 Games against playoff teams: 5

2 DENVER BRONCOS

One way or another the Trade, like the Drive, will go down in team history. The onus is on Champ Bailey to make it a happy memory

THE ARGUMENT goes like this: Mike Shanahan must have been out of his mind in March when he traded second-year running back Clinton Portis to the Washington Redskins for fifth-year cornerback Champ Bailey. It was the first time in 32

years that two players who had just appeared in a Pro Bowl were exchanged for each other. (The Chargers sent defensive tackle Coy Bacon to the Rams for quarterback John Hadl in 1972.) Conventional wisdom says you don't trade a healthy, 22-year-old back with a pair of 1,500-yard seasons on his résumé, no matter

how successful your organization has been at replenishing the position. Yes, Bailey will make quarterbacks think twice about throwing to his side of the field, but he can't have as much impact on a game as Portis, who averaged 5.5 yards a carry and scored 14 touchdowns last season. But that's not all that matters anymore, and here's the other side of the argument: The game has changed. Look at the last four Super Bowl winners: Only one had a standout running back (Jamal Lewis with the Ravens in 2000), but each team had a superior cornerback (Ty Law with the Patriots in '03 and '01, Ronde Barber with the Buccaneers in '02, and Duane Starks and Chris McAlister with the Ravens in '00). After Denver acquired Bailey, Shanahan asked the team's media information manager, Mark Cicero, to do

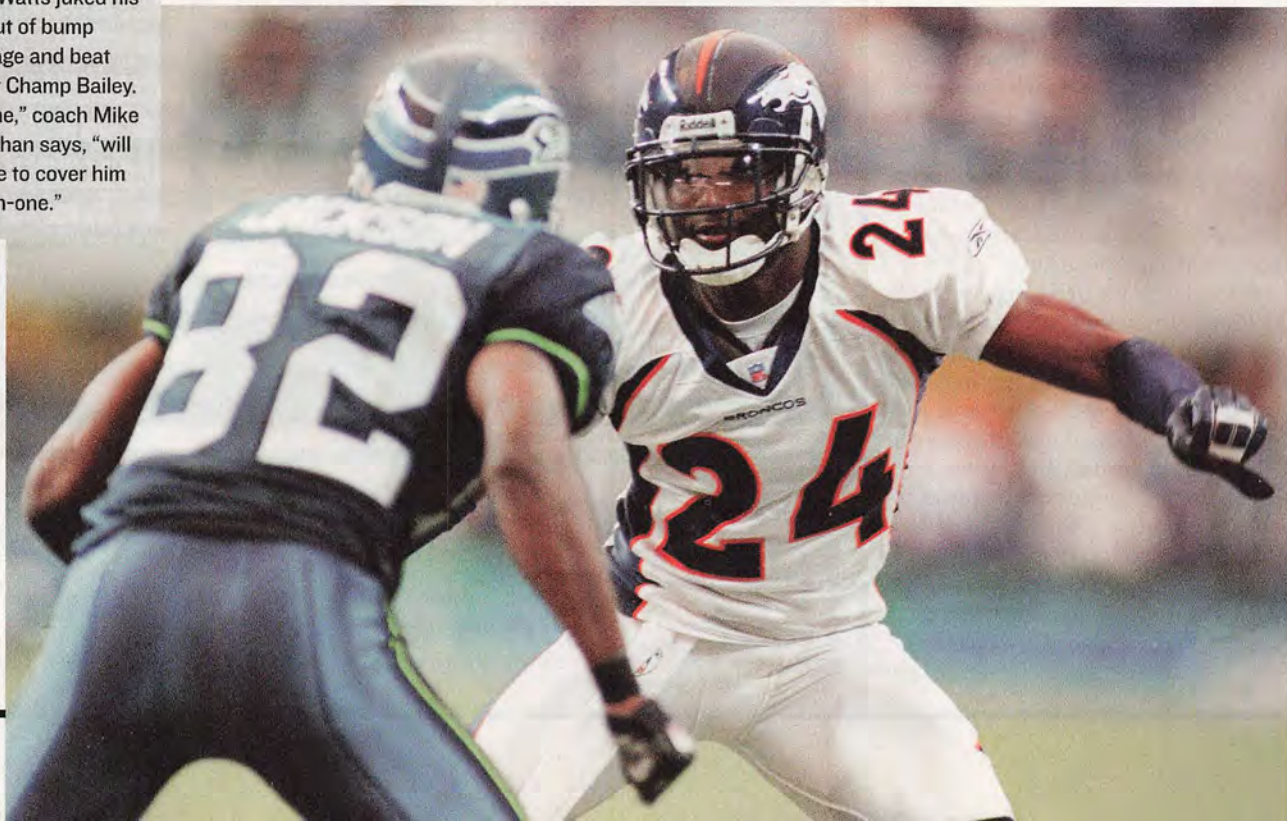
some research. It seemed to Shanahan that the teams that marched through the playoffs did so not because they had the most offensive firepower but because they played good defense.

Cicero discovered that no Super Bowl winner in the last 15 years had ranked lower than eighth in the league in scoring defense. (Last season Denver was ninth in fewest points allowed.) In fact, the last four Super Bowl champs ranked first, first, sixth and first, respectively, in scoring defense while standing only 12th, 18th, sixth and 14th, respectively, in scoring offense. Shanahan used those stats to get his players' attention at the start of training camp. "But then he gave us one

CORNER POCKET The Broncos are banking on Bailey to shut down his side of the field and get the turnover ratio up.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Third-year wideout Ashley Lelie has yet to become the impact player Denver expected, but rookie **DARIUS WATTS**, a 6' 2" burner from Marshall, might provide the motivation he needs. Early in camp Watts juked his way out of bump coverage and beat corner Champ Bailey. "No one," coach Mike Shanahan says, "will be able to cover him one-on-one."



that really opened my eyes," says wideout Rod Smith, "and it says everything about what it means to be a good team." Each of the last 15 Super Bowl winners had a plus turnover margin over the regular season, with the past four listed at +17, +17, +7 and +23. (Denver, on the other hand, had a league-low nine interceptions in 2003 and finished 22nd in turnover margin, at -4.)

The Broncos think Bailey can help rectify that by denying opponents a chunk of the field in man coverage, thus freeing a hard-hitting safety, such as free-agent signee John Lynch, to provide additional run-stopping support. "I always try to push my coaches to let us play man-to-man," Bailey says. "I love to cover guys one-on-one."

As for giving up Portis, Denver also factored in the back's penchant for burning the candle at both ends and his desire for a big new contract. Portis, who enjoys the nightlife, was about to enter the third season of a four-year, \$2.5 million deal. Shanahan feared that if he didn't give Portis an extension and make him the highest-paid runner in the NFL, the back's unhappiness would be a distraction all season. A Portis-for-Bailey swap straight up would have been a good trade for Denver. When the Redskins threw in the 41st pick in last spring's draft—Shanahan insisted he wouldn't do the deal without it—the trade became a gimme. The Broncos spent that pick on Oklahoma State's Tatum Bell, who, like Portis, is a powerful juking back.

"In the end I just knew we could find a back—we always have," says Shanahan, who in nine years as Denver's coach has drafted four backs after the first round who each went on to rush for more than 1,000 yards in a season (Terrell Davis, Mike Anderson, Olandis Gary and Portis). "But you look at history, and the corner has made a difference. Look at the 49ers a decade ago: Deion Sanders made all the difference when they brought him in; he was the missing piece. After the way our season ended last year [a 41-10 strafing by the Colts in the wild-card round], we felt we needed a corner."

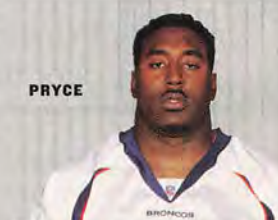
Bailey is not the shutdown corner Sanders was, but he's more physical. On the day Bailey arrived in Denver, he said, "I won't be a disappointment. I guarantee that."

—P.K.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

I really like this team on both sides of the ball—if they can develop a receiving threat to help **Jake Plummer**. Jake's perfect for **Mike Shanahan** because he knows when to run and he's a more accurate passer than he was in Arizona. But **Rod Smith** is a possession receiver now, and if **Ashley Lelie** doesn't become a downfield threat, the offense will struggle. . . . Maybe they won't be as explosive without Clinton Portis, but the running game will be just as productive because **Quentin Griffin** and **Tatum Bell** are capable backs. . . . The offensive line might fall off a bit because assistant coach Alex Gibbs is now with Atlanta. But as long as the refs let **Dan Neil** hold on every play—which they do—the interior of that line will be strong. . . . **Trevor Pryce** is my favorite defensive lineman in the league, quick enough to get to the quarterback, strong enough to play the run well. . . . The underrated guy on that defense is corner **Lenny Walls**. He battles receivers. . . . I like their defensive speed, and [coordinator] **Larry Coyer**'s schemes fit this unit much better than Ray Rhodes's did.

PRYCE



“As long as the refs let Dan Neil hold on every play—which they do—the line will be strong.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 2/22/7
DEFENSE 7/6/4

COACH: Mike Shanahan;
10th season with Denver
(99-65 in NFL)

QUENTIN GRIFFIN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	28	94	345	3.7
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
8	61	7.6	0	

JAKE PLUMMER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	83	302	189	62.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,182	15	7	91.2	

REUBEN DROUGHS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	248	6	14	2.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
9	87	9.7	2	

JASON ELAM

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	132	39	39
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
27	31	120	

OFFENSE

ROD SMITH

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	77	74	845	3

JED WEAVER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	190	35	437	1

MATT LEPSIS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	290	16	16

BEN HAMILTON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	283	16	16

TOM NALEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	286	16	16

DAN NEIL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 2"	295	14	14

GEORGE FOSTER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	338	1	0

ASHLEY LELIE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	119	37	628	2

DEFENSE

JASHON SYKES

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	52	0	0

RAYLEE JOHNSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RE	13	4

MARIO FATAFEH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RT	31	2½

AL WILSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	88	1	0

LUTHER ELLISS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LT	0	0

TREVOR PRYCE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LE	36	8½

D.J. WILLIAMS (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	82	6	0

MICAH KNORR

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	68	43.2

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	12 KANSAS CITY 19 at Jacksonville 26 SAN DIEGO	3 at Tampa Bay 10 CAROLINA 17 at Oakland 25 at Cincinnati (M) 31 ATLANTA	7 HOUSTON 14 Open date 21 at New Orleans 28 OAKLAND	5 at San Diego 12 MIAMI 19 at Kansas City 25 at Tennessee (S)	2 INDIANAPOLIS (M) MONDAY (S) SATURDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL rank: T-23 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .488 Games against playoff teams: 6

3 OAKLAND RAIDERS

In a major renovation project, the dilapidated defense has been turned over to a former Pats assistant and a crew of veteran free-agent pickups

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> The Raiders need a young overachiever on an ancient defensive line, and **TYLER BRAYTON**, who has the burst to get around most right tackles on the pass rush, is that player. As a rookie who started every game last season, the 6' 6", 280-pound end had 2½ sacks. With new schemes that will get him around defenders more effectively, he should approach double digits.

THE RAIDERS were busy as usual in the off-season, this time trying to patch together a defense to replace the pathetic 2003 unit that surrendered a league-high 157 rushing yards per game and ranked 30th overall. Oakland went about its latest reclamation project in typical fashion: pursuing players from other clubs, but going particularly hard at the team that succeeded it as the AFC champ last year.

The Raiders signed two of the three defensive linemen who started for the Patriots in Super Bowl XXXVIII, end Bobby Hamilton and mountainous tackle Ted Washington (both free agents), and

when New England defensive assistant Eric Mangini turned down an offer to become Oakland's defensive coordinator, the Raiders filled the job with another Pats aide, Rob Ryan (son of former NFL coordinator and coach Buddy Ryan). Moreover, two former Pro Bowl defensive players, lineman Warren Sapp (Tampa Bay) and secondary standout Ray Buchanan (Atlanta), chose to head for the Bay Area as free agents after a combined 16 years with their former teams.

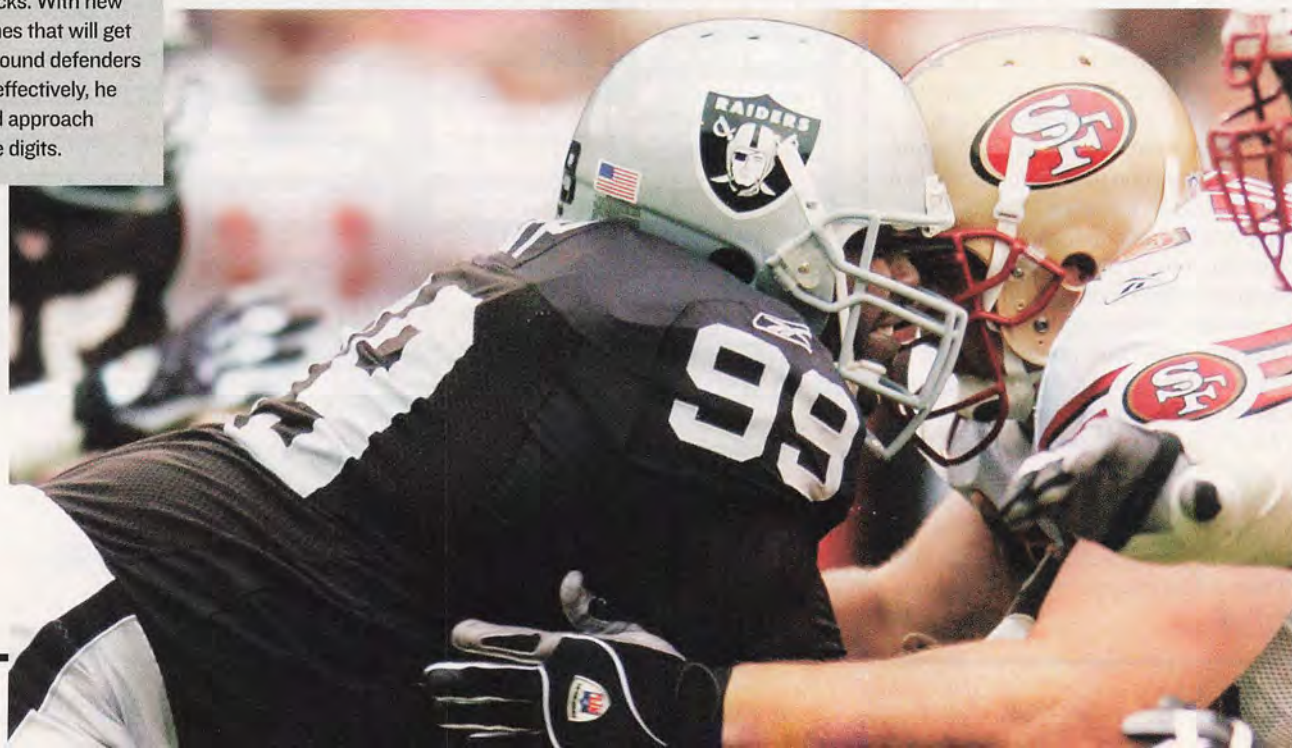
But can a first-year coordinator get his veteran troops to learn and accept the nuances of the complex 3-4-3 scheme in time to build a competitive defense? More specifically, can Sapp, 31, adjust to right end in the three-man front, playing over tackles who are bigger and more athletic than the guards he's accustomed to facing at defensive tackle in the 4-3? Can Buchanan, 32, who has spent his entire career at corner, move seamlessly to safety?

Can Washington, 36, who has suffered a broken leg in each of the last two seasons, make it through the year and justify the \$14 million contract Oakland gave him?

"I've probably worked for the two best defensive coaches in the history of the game—my dad and [New England coach] Bill Belichick," Ryan says, "and we're taking a little bit from both of them. We're going to attack the way my dad did, and with all the multiple schemes we'll eventually have, we're going to be awfully similar to New England."

It's imperative that Ryan's defense keep the score down, because it's going to be hard for the Raiders' offense to put up points without a consistent receiving threat or a true No. 1 running back. The Raiders are so thin at receiver that through

HEAVY LABOR Sapp (99) is happy to be a Raider, but isn't wild about a 3-4 scheme that pits him against left tackles.



ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

much of training camp they used a former college quarterback, Ronald Curry, as a third receiver, with green 2003 sixth-rounder Doug Gabriel challenging Curry. Long term, the team hopes that Gabriel, who has deceptive speed and good hands, wins the starting job currently held by Jerry Rice. At running back, 10-year vet Tyrone Wheatley will get first crack, followed by Cowboys reject Troy Hambrick, 2003 third-round draft pick Justin Fargas and scatback Amos Zereoue.

In the 3-4 the defensive front will consist of Sapp, Washington and second-year man Tyler Brayton; in the four-man line it'll probably be Brayton, Washington, Sapp and John Parrella. Hamilton will be a key sub.

Though Washington made no tackles in the Patriots' Super Bowl win over Carolina, he was a force in the game, helping form the wall that held Panthers back Stephen Davis to 49 yards rushing. "I don't think we had a more valuable player that day," Ryan says. But Washington was on the field for only 30% of the defensive snaps last year, missing six games with his broken leg and coming out of the lineup in passing situations. "We're going to be smart about how we use him," says Ryan. But come November, if teams are running on the Raiders, it'll be hard to spot-play Washington. And how much of a break can Ryan give him if he plans to use Washington at nosetackle in the 3-4 and at left tackle in the 4-3?

Sapp, on the other hand, was more penetrator than mauler with the Buccaneers. Conquering left tackles from the end position in the 3-4 is something he never had to do in Tampa. "I don't think it'll fit me like a glove, but I'm going to make it fit," he says. "I just told [the coaches], 'Don't ask me to do something I'm physically unable to do.' They won't."

In the New England-style defense, the pressure from the front seven enables the guys in the back to make plays. That means cornerbacks Phillip Buchanon and Charles Woodson could be the biggest beneficiaries. "I know [Patriots cornerback] Ty Law pretty well," says Buchanon, "and last year when I'd call him, he'd tell me that on lots of plays the ball just flew into his lap. As a defensive back, I think this defense is going to be heaven."

Or hell, if the thirtysomethings up front don't hold up for 16 games. —P.K.

This team is in trouble, and I can't see it reaching .500. . . . The two best things going for the Raiders are on offense: Whichever quarterback doesn't start—probably **Kerry Collins**—will be a terrific backup, and [rookie] **Robert Gallery** is one of the five best left tackles in football. . . . Gallery and their rookie center, **Jake Grove**, give them toughness on the offensive line, which they desperately need. . . . They have a bushel of marginal backs, and it's almost the same situation at receiver. I like the burst of [wideout and kick returner] **Doug Gabriel**, but they can't depend on him as a future star. The one receiver who intrigues me is rookie **Carlos Francis**, who is one of the fastest players in the league and has decent hands. . . . If **Ted Washington** gets hurt, which has happened in the last two seasons, that run defense will be awful. They're depending too much on really old guys on the front, and I don't see them holding up. . . . **Charles Woodson** gets beat too much to be a franchise corner. They should move him to safety.



FRANCIS

“They’re depending too much on old guys on the defensive front, and I don’t see them holding up.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics



2003 RECORD: 4-12
NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 16/27/25
DEFENSE 32/22/30

COACH: Norv Turner;
first season with Oakland
(49-59-1 in NFL)

TYRONE WHEATLEY				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	65	159	678	4.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	RATING
12	120	10.0	4	

RICH GANNON				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	74	225	125	55.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	ATT.	RATING
1,274	6	4	73.5	

ZACK CROCKETT				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	263	48	145	3.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
7	53	7.6	7	

SEBASTIAN JANIKOWSKI				
POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.	
K	165	28	29	
FG MADE	FG ATT.	Pts.		
22	25	94		

OFFENSE				
JERRY RICE				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	79	63	869	2

ROLAND WILLIAMS*				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	268	27	213	0

BARRY SIMS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	300	16	16

FRANK MIDDLETON				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	330	10	8

ADAM TREU				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	300	16	4

RON STONE				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	325	13	13

LANGSTON WALKER				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 8"	345	16	8

JERRY PORTER				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	103	28	361	1

DEFENSE				
DELAWARE GRANT				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	18	1	0	

NAPOLEON HARRIS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
ILB	109	2		

TYLER BRAYTON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
RE	61	2½		

TED WASHINGTON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
NT	40	2		

WARREN SAPP				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
LE	44	5		

DWAYNE RUDD				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS		
ILB	11	0		

TRAVIAN SMITH				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	60	1	0	

CHARLES WOODSON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	70	3		

PHILLIP BUCHANON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	44	6		

DERRICK GIBSON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
SS	65	1	2	

RAY BUCHANAN				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
FS	38	0	1	

SHANE LECHLER				
POS.	POINTS	AVG.		
P	96	46.9		

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2002 stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
12 at Pittsburgh 19 BUFFALO 26 TAMPA BAY	3 at Houston 10 at Indianapolis 17 DENVER 24 NEW ORLEANS 31 at San Diego	7 at Carolina 14 Open date 21 SAN DIEGO 28 at Denver	5 KANSAS CITY 12 at Atlanta 19 TENNESSEE 25 at Kansas City (S)	2 JACKSONVILLE (S) SATURDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-7** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.512** Games against playoff teams: **5**

4 SAN DIEGO CHARGERS

Who knows what the future holds for this team? Until a pass rusher is found and a quarterback is developed, there's no end in sight to the losing

THE CHARGERS' future is like a blank canvas. They are the closest thing to an anonymous team that the NFL has had in years. Other than running back LaDainian Tomlinson and the backup quarterback, Doug Flutie, can you name three San Diego players? One receiver? One defensive lineman? During training camp at The Home Depot Center in the Los Angeles suburb of Carson, there was more fan interest in the nearby X Games than in the only NFL franchise in Southern California.

"You're right," says general manager A.J. Smith, no household name himself. "If you're a fan and you look at us, you say, 'Who are these people?' Our plan is to build through the draft, not with the big-dollar, Pro Bowl free agents. That doesn't work. We've had 16 nonwinning seasons in our last 20, but if we make the right draft choices, and they develop, we'll win."

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> The first Russian-born player drafted in the NFL, defensive end **IGOR OLSHANSKY**, will be chasing down quarterbacks from the get-go. "I think he'll be a star in this league," says general manager A.J. Smith, who drafted the 6' 6", 309-pounder out of Oregon in the second round. "He's an impact player who should come on very quickly."

The uncertainty of youth—the Chargers will start 15 players 25 and younger—is how coach Marty Schottenheimer characterizes the coming season. "With a group of young guys," he says, "sometimes you look into their eyes and all you see are the backs of their heads." Schottenheimer will have to speed up the learning curve, if he hopes to reach .500 this season and save his job on the heels of 8–8 and 4–12 seasons.

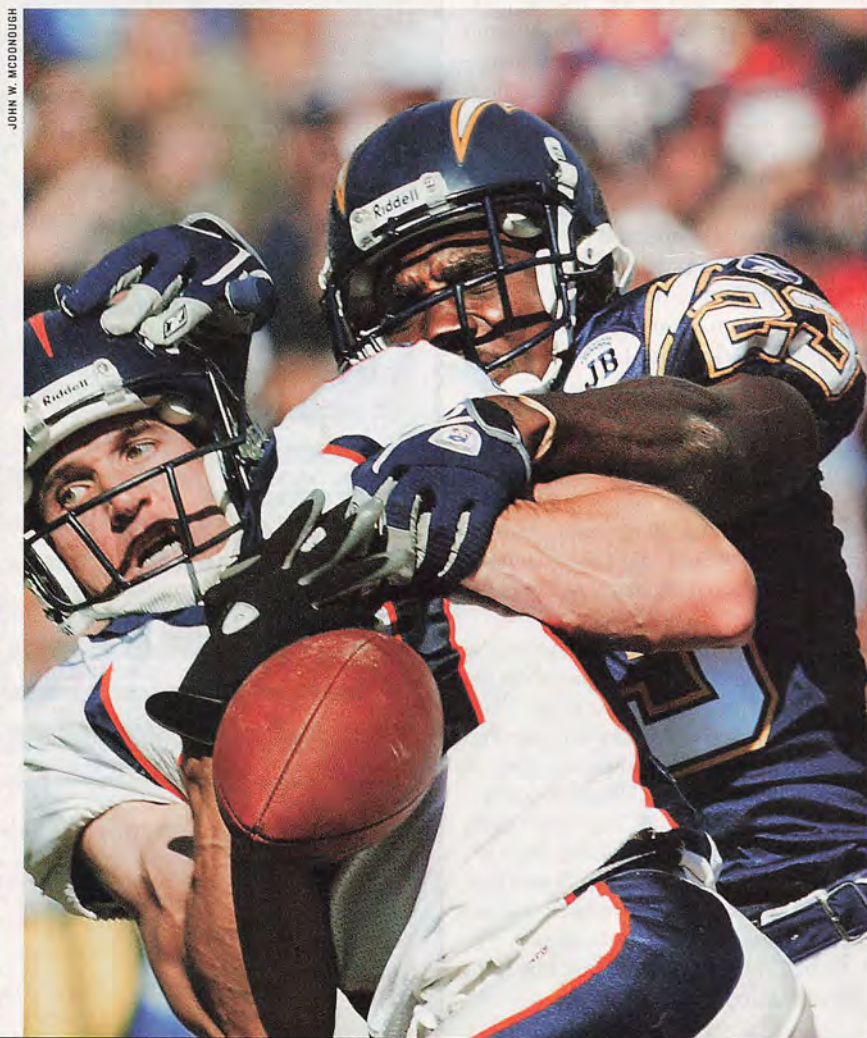
One of the top priorities is fixing a pass

defense that last year allowed opposing quarterbacks to complete 61.5% of their attempts (25th in the league). New coordinator Wade Phillips is looking for a pass rusher from among a thin pool of candidates. Does he bank on defensive end Adrian Dingle, a sixth-year veteran who's playing on a shaky knee? Or linebacker Steve Foley, a free-agent pickup who has 10½ sacks in 67 NFL games? Or rookie

Igor Olshanky, who played tackle in college but is making the switch to end in Phillips's 3–4?

Players like cornerback Sammy Davis, who started all 16 games and intercepted two passes as a rookie last year, have to

SECONDARY REASON Quentin Jammer (23) is one of three starting defensive backs with two years experience or less.



JOHN W. McDONOUGH

put their on-the-job training in 2003 to good use this season. "It's a must for the young guys in the secondary to be good for the team to be good," he says. "You can't ask LaDainian to do it all. We're young, and nobody knows us yet, but I can guarantee you the defense will be a lot better this season."

Smith says he was embarrassed by the play of a once-formidable defense that ranked 27th in the league last year and 30th in 2002. After one loss last season, mindful of the long road to respectability, he went up to Tomlinson, who in his first three seasons has rushed for 4,564 yards on a team that has won 17 games, and told him, "I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure your career is not played in vain."

On offense San Diego needs to balance its attack, and to that end the team used the first pick in the draft on a quarterback. Even that blew up. The Chargers were rebuffed in their efforts to bring Eli Manning into the fold, so they traded his rights to the Giants for the fourth overall selection, Philip Rivers, only to have to deal with a nasty holdout by the gifted passer out of North Carolina State. Rivers finally agreed to a six-year contract on Aug. 23.

With Rivers coming in late, it was left to fourth-year veteran Drew Brees, who has mostly failed in 27 tries as the San Diego starting quarterback, to lead the young unknowns through camp. When Brees stepped into the huddle, he looked around and saw two linemen (center Jason Ball and tackle Phil Bogle), a tight end (Antonio Gates) and a wide receiver (Eric Parker) who weren't even drafted and had a total of 10 years of NFL experience.

One summer day Tomlinson overheard the bright-eyed Parker talking about San Diego making the Super Bowl this year, and the star running back told him, "Eric, man, you have to be realistic."

Says Tomlinson, "I've studied NFL history, and it's pretty rare that you go from 4-12 to winning the Super Bowl in one year. [The 1999 Rams were the only team to do so.] My freshman year at TCU we went 1-10. The next year we were 7-5 and beat USC, and we were on our way. That's why, for us, we have to think about .500 right now. Get to 8-8 and build from there."

—P.K.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

The best player on this team, other than **LaDainian Tomlinson**, is the tight end, **Antonio Gates**. He can run, has very good hands and is a willing blocker. He's going to be one of the best tight ends in the league. Imagine how good he would be if he had played football in college instead of basketball. . . . The receivers have no speed. . . . I don't trust the offensive line. **Toniou Fonoti** looks as if he doesn't want to play. **Courtney VanBuren** lacks intensity. . . . They didn't want **Drew Brees** to play anymore, and now he has to because of the long holdout by **Philip Rivers**. Typical Chargers. . . . With new coordinator **Wade Phillips** on board and the defense changing from the 4-3 to the 3-4, it means the only way the pass rush will work is with good corners who can hold their coverage. I'm very impressed with **Sammy Davis's** technique and effort at one corner. This is the third year for **Quentin Jammer** on the other side, and it's vital that he becomes the shutdown guy they drafted him to be. . . . I like **Jamal Williams** at nosetackle because he's tough and strong. But he's been hurt in parts of the last three years, and they have no one behind him.

GATES



Imagine how good Antonio Gates would be if he'd played football in college instead of basketball.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 4-12

NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 6/19/14
DEFENSE T-25/21/27

COACH: Marty Schottenheimer; third season with San Diego (165-113-1 in NFL)

LADAINIAN TOMLINSON					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
RB	2	313	1,645	5.3	13
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
100	725	7.3	4		

DREW Brees					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%	RATING
QB	187	356	205	57.6	
YARDS	TDs	INT.	YARDS	TDs	
2108	11	15	67.5		

LORENZO NEAL					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
FB	264	18	40	2.2	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
16	62	3.9	1		

NATE KADING (R)					
POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.		
K	292	40	40		
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PCT.			
20	21	100			

OFFENSE

KEVIN DYSON					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
WR	209	2	15	0	

ANTONIO GATES					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
TE	112	24	389	2	

ROMAN OBEN					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LT	6' 4"	305	15	13	

TONIU FONOTI					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LG	6' 4"	349	0	0	

NICK HARDWICK (R)					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
C	6' 3"	283	13	13	

MIKE GOFF					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RG	6' 5"	306	16	16	

COURTNEY VANBUREN					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RT	6' 5"	350	8	7	

ERIC PARKER					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
WR	155	18	244	3	

DEFENSE

STEVE FOLEY					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	26	1	0		

DONNIE EDWARDS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
ILB	162	1/2	2		

ADRIAN DINGLE					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
RE	37	6			

JAMAL WILLIAMS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
NT	33	1			

IGOR OLSHANSKY (R)					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
LE	58	6 1/2			

RANDALL GODFREY					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
ILB	59	0	1		

BEN LEBER					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	80	3	0		

MIKE SCIFRES*					
POS.	PUNTS	AVG.			
P	53	48.0			



NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (stats for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2002 college stats

SCHEDULE	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	12 at Houston 19 N.Y. JETS 26 at Denver	3 TENNESSEE 10 JACKSONVILLE 17 at Atlanta 24 at Carolina 31 OAKLAND	7 NEW ORLEANS 14 Open date 21 at Oakland 28 at Kansas City	5 DENVER 12 TAMPA BAY 19 at Cleveland 26 at Indianapolis	2 KANSAS CITY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-16 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .508 Games against playoff teams: 5

1 PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

Two understudies move into starting roles in the secondary, having to cover for departed veterans in the glare of a run at the Super Bowl

ROOKIES KNOW their place in the Eagles training camp lunchroom. Established veterans usually gather at the same few tables every day—no rookies allowed—and Sheldon Brown and Lito Sheppard remember what it was like to watch those older players from afar in 2002, when they were eager, wide-eyed first-year cornerbacks. They'd peer across the room at quarterback Donovan McNabb, free safety Brian Dawkins and cornerback Troy Vincent, all Pro Bowl players whom the young guys looked up to. "We'd sit there and think about all those big-name guys," Sheppard says, "and we'd say to ourselves, How can we make it to *that* table?"

Brown and Sheppard are no longer dreaming. They not only eat with the big boys but also are expected to produce like the men they once admired from afar. Both players will be starters this

season, replacing Vincent and fellow corner Bobby Taylor, who left Philadelphia as free agents. It's a huge challenge. Over the last eight seasons Taylor and Vincent formed one of the league's best pass-coverage tandems, combining for 47 interceptions.

But this transition in the Eagles' secondary was inevitable. Impressed with the athleticism and composure of the two young corners, Philly selected Sheppard in the first round of the 2002 draft and then picked Brown in the second. The only

knock against them—and they bristle whenever they hear it—is their size: Brown and Sheppard are 5' 10" and just short of 200 pounds, a noticeable drop in size from Taylor (6' 3", 216) and Vincent (6' 1", 200). "When we drafted these guys, we knew they could run, cover and play with a lot of toughness," says defensive coordinator Jim Johnson. "We realize they're not the biggest corners in the NFL,

but they've made plays the last two years. Every once in a while a tall receiver will jump [over them] for a catch, but they're good enough athletes that they'll prevent some of those catches as well."

Also, Brown and Sheppard unexpectedly, **HIGH CALIBER** Sheppard (26) and Brown are good enough athletes that their height—5' 10"—is not a shortcoming.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Second-year tight end **L.J. SMITH** has great hands and quickness, runs crisp routes, has the speed to get past linebackers and the size (6' 3", 258) to muscle safeties. He's behind three-time Pro Bowler Chad Lewis, but he will get his chances. The Eagles like two tight end sets, and Terrell Owens will open up pass-catching opportunities over the middle.



H. RUMPH JR./AP

edly picked up valuable playing time last season when injuries to Taylor and Vincent forced Brown into the starting lineup for nine games and Sheppard for three. Brown, the more accomplished of the two young defensive backs, played in nickel and dime situations as a rookie. Over the past two seasons both players showed their maturity by not getting flustered after making mistakes.

Keeping their cool and executing their assignments is crucial in Philadelphia's aggressive, blitzing defense. Johnson says he will not go to more conservative schemes because Brown and Sheppard are in the lineup. The coordinator thinks both players have the speed to be outstanding blitz corners, and notes that they will have plenty of help around them. The addition of free-agent defensive end Jevon Kearsa bolsters a pass rush that produced a modest 38 sacks in 2003, and Dawkins, a three-time Pro Bowler, remains the heart of the secondary. "Coach Johnson doesn't put his corners in positions to lose games," Brown says. "Bobby Taylor and Troy Vincent are great players, but they also knew they had Brian Dawkins and [strong safety] Michael Lewis playing over the top a lot. And whenever I know I have those guys back there, I'm going to be gambling."

Serving as understudies to Taylor and Vincent was a great advantage for Brown and Sheppard. They learned how to study quarterbacks and receivers, read their routes and spot their tendencies. Defensive tackle Corey Simon says, "Every time you saw those guys—whether it was on the field or in the meeting room—they were sitting next to Bobby and Troy, asking them a bunch of questions about the game. They really picked their brains."

They still do. Though he's now with the Bills, Vincent calls Brown and Sheppard regularly. One morning during training camp Brown answered his phone, and it was Vincent asking all the usual questions, such as how Brown was playing and if he was being physical with receivers. But before hanging up, Vincent also reminded his protégé that this is Brown's time to earn respect around the league. "Lito and I are carrying on what Bobby and Troy started here, and I think people will be impressed by how we play," Brown says. "We don't want to talk about what we're going to do. We're just going to show it on the field."

—Jeffri Chadiha

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

Donovan McNabb is a top five quarterback in leadership, ability and performance, but they've really limited him. He's not the running threat he was earlier in his career, and he doesn't pick defenses apart. Quarterbacks in the West Coast offense should be throwing for high completion percentages, and he doesn't. . . . **Brian Westbrook** is good when he's healthy; he'll catch the ball out of the backfield and make big plays. Anytime you have a receiver like **Terrell Owens**, who has great ability downfield, it makes a guy like Westbrook more dangerous when quarterbacks check down to him. . . . Owens will make a lot of other guys better. Defenses are going to roll their coverage to him, and that's going to create more one-on-one matchups for **Todd Pinkston** and **Freddie Mitchell**. . . . **Jevon Kearsa** has to prove he can stay healthy, but as far as talent, there aren't many guys at that position with more of it. . . . I don't think linebacker is a strength for them, but **Jeremiah Trotter** should help. . . . Free safety **Brian Dawkins** is a great player with real good instincts. When teams play the Eagles, he's the first guy they talk about. They want to know how they can avoid him.

WESTBROOK



“Brian Dawkins is a great player. When teams play the Eagles, he's the first guy they talk about.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 12-4

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 9/20/18

DEFENSE 22/16/20

COACH: Andy Reid; sixth season with Philadelphia (51-29 in NFL)

BRIAN WESTBROOK

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	48	117	613	5.2
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
37	332	9.0	13	

DONOVAN McNABB

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	30	478	275	57.5
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,216	16	11	79.6	

JON RITCHIE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	321	1	1	1.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
17	86	5.1	3	

DAVID AKERS

POS.	PVR	XPS	MADE	XPS ATT.
K	108	42	42	
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.		
24	29	114		

OFFENSE

TERRELL OWENS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	17	80	1,102	9

CHAD LEWIS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	126	23	293	1

TRA THOMAS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	349	15	15

JERMANE MAYBERRY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	325	5	5

HANK FRALEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	300	16	16

SHAWN ANDREWS (R)

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	373	13	12

JON RUNYAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	330	16	16

TODD PINKSTON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	191	36	575	2

DEFENSE

DHANI JONES

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	118	3	0

DERRICK BURGESS*

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	30	6	

DARWIN WALKER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	42	6	

MARK SIMONEAU

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	101	2	0

COREY SIMON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	40	7½	

JEVON KEARSE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	42	9½	

NATE WAYNE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	90	3	1

DIRK JOHNSON

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	79	40.6

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2001 stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 N.Y. GIANTS
20 MINNESOTA (M)
26 at Detroit

OCTOBER

3 at Chicago
10 Open date
17 CAROLINA
24 at Cleveland
31 BALTIMORE

NOVEMBER

7 at Pittsburgh
15 at Dallas (M)
21 WASHINGTON
28 at N.Y. Giants

DECEMBER

5 GREEN BAY
12 at Washington
19 DALLAS
27 at St. Louis (M)

JANUARY

2 CINCINNATI

(M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 31 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .473 Games against playoff teams: 7

2 WASHINGTON REDSKINS

With the return of Joe Gibbs and the trade for an elite running back, the franchise looks to its former offense to recapture its former glory

CLINTON PORTIS rarely took much notice of the admiring fans screaming his name at Redskins training camp, but one gruff voice caught his attention in early August. "Hey, Clinton," a man bellowed as Portis walked toward the practice field. "We want 3,500 yards from you this season." Portis whirled and squinted at the crowd. When he couldn't locate the source of the comical statement, he shook his head in bemusement and strolled on, convinced that some fans are far too giddy about his arrival in Washington.

But Portis understands that this is an exciting time for Skins fans. Joe Gibbs has returned as coach after a 12-year hiatus as a NASCAR team owner, and the offense has gone back to pounding the football. Washington was a dysfunctional, pass-happy, losing team in two seasons under coach Steve Spurrier, but Por-

tis is the key to the attack now. He was acquired in an off-season trade with the Broncos, who received Pro Bowl cornerback Champ Bailey and a second-round pick. "The expectations are high, but it's good to have that pressure on me," Portis says. "I'm going to be the man, and everybody knows that. We're not trying to fool anybody. They're going to hand me the ball and see what I can do with it."

Redskins faithful hope he can erase the memory of the team's ill-fated decision to re-

lease running back

Stephen Davis after the 2002 season. Davis went on to become the heart of the Panthers' offense, gaining 1,444 yards last year and helping that team reach the Super Bowl. Washington needs Portis to have a similar impact. Last season the team ranked 22nd in the NFL in rushing (103.3 yards per game) and didn't have a runner gain more than 600 yards.

The 23-year-old Portis already has rushed for 3,099 yards and 29 touchdowns in two seasons. He has field sense, quickness and so much speed that Redskins wide receiver Laveranues Coles says, "The defense has to respect the fact that Clinton can go the distance every

CLINTON ADMINISTRATION The pass-first Redskins of the Spurrier era will now live or die on the legs of Portis.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Fourth-year corner **FRED SMOOT** is the MVP in the secondary now that Champ Bailey's gone. He has all the skills of a cover corner—quickness, speed, body control, anticipation—and last season he proved his toughness by playing with a bruised sternum. Quarterbacks won't pick on him much, but he's a gambler and will make the most of whatever comes his way.

AL MESSERSCHMIDT/WIREIMAGE.COM

release running back



time he touches the ball.” Adds offensive coordinator Don Breaux, “Clinton is out of the same mold as an Emmitt Smith or a Walter Payton. He’s not very big [5’ 11”, 205 pounds], but he’s compact and attacks with the ball. He runs with some body-lean and power, and he doesn’t mind sticking it up in there.”

Though Portis is excited to be in Washington, he still is surprised at how quickly he went from Denver to D.C. He had just returned from the Pro Bowl in Hawaii early last February when the news broke that he was in a contract dispute. A second-round pick in the 2002 draft, Portis had signed a four-year contract that included a \$1.29 million signing bonus but had a low annual base salary, so he wanted a new deal. He says coach Mike Shanahan told him that reworking the contract of a second-year player would set a bad precedent for the team. Two weeks later Portis was a Redskin.

The trade didn’t bother Portis, but he’s annoyed by the perception by some in the press that the Broncos had dealt him because they believe any back can gain 1,000 yards in their system. (Since 1995, a Denver back has picked up at least 1,000 yards in every season but one.) Portis points out that last season he averaged a league-high 5.5 yards per carry—tops among the recent 1,000-yard rushers in Denver.

The main question surrounding Portis is his durability. Gibbs has ridden big backs, such as John Riggins and Gerald Riggs, to great success in an offense that can demand 325 carries or more of the feature back. Portis did not have more than 290 rushing attempts in either of his first two seasons, he missed three games in 2003 with minor injuries, and he will be running behind a line that has already lost one starter for the season to injury.

For Gibbs’s offense to be as effective this year as it was when the Redskins won three Super Bowls during his first run as coach, from 1981 through ’92, Portis will have to have a standout season. “I don’t feel like I have to prove to anybody that the Redskins got the better end of the deal,” Portis says. “I just need to play like I know how. Even if I gain 1,200 or 1,300 yards and we make the playoffs, I won’t be a failure. They brought me here for wins, not statistics.” —J.C.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

The only question on their offensive line is at right tackle. Now that **Jon Jansen** is out [ruptured Achilles], they don’t have a solid backup. They have rookies they can throw in there, but that’s a spot where you want some stability, especially if [lefthanded] **Mark Brunell** is the quarterback. . . . I like their quarterback situation. Brunell is tough, but **Patrick Ramsey** is too. Either one could get the job done. . . . Their receivers are decent. If **Laveranues Coles** can stay healthy, his speed makes him dangerous, and **Rod Gardner**’s size makes him a nice complement. . . . Defensively, they could have problems at cornerback, because they don’t have much depth, and **Fred Smoot** and **Walt Harris** are already banged up. . . . **Lavar Arrington** has to take another step up in his game. He’s a Pro Bowl guy, but he has to be even more of a force. They’ll move him around a lot, so he should have a big impact. . . . They spent a lot of money on **Cornelius Griffin**, but he’s not exceptional playing the pass or the run. Their ends aren’t going to provide much pressure either. That’s why they’re talking about blitzing their linebackers a lot.

ARRINGTON



“They spent a lot of money on Cornelius Griffin, but he’s not exceptional playing the pass or run.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 22/21/23

DEFENSE 24/14/25

COACH: Joe Gibbs; second tour with Washington (124-60 in NFL)

CLINTON PORTIS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	3	290	1,591	5.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
38	314	8.3	14	

MARK BRUNELL

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	105	82	54	65.9
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
484	2	0	89.7	

BRIAN KOZLOWSKI

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
H-B	283	10	87	0

JOHN HALL

POS.	PVR	XPts MADE	XPts ATT.
K	184	26	27
FG MADE	FG ATT.	Pts.	
25	33	101	

OFFENSE

LAVERANUES COLES

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	32	82	1,204	6

WALTER RASBY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	328	6	55	0

CHRIS SAMUELS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	310	13	13

DERRICK DOCKERY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 6"	345	16	13

LENNIE FRIEDMAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	283	16	8

RANDY THOMAS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	306	16	16

KENYATTA JONES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 3"	307	0	0

ROD GARDNER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	148	59	600	5

DEFENSE

LAVAR ARRINGTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	88	6	0

PHILLIP DANIELS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	53	2½	

BRANDON NOBLE*

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	31	0	

MIKE BARROW

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	148	2	0

CORNELIUS GRIFFIN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
LT	55	1	

RENALDO WYNN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	29	2	

MARCUS WASHINGTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	81	6	0



FRED SMOOT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	57	4	

MATT BOWEN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	83	0	3

SEAN TAYLOR (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	77	1	10

SHAWN SPRINGS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	43	1	

TOM TUPA

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	83	43.3

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (stats for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2002 stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 TAMPA BAY
19 at N.Y. Giants
27 DALLAS (M)

OCTOBER

3 at Cleveland
10 BALTIMORE
17 at Chicago
24 Open date
31 GREEN BAY

NOVEMBER

7 at Detroit
14 CINCINNATI
21 at Philadelphia
28 at Pittsburgh

DECEMBER

5 N.Y. GIANTS
12 PHILADELPHIA
18 at San Francisco (S)
26 at Dallas

JANUARY

2 MINNESOTA
(M) MONDAY
(S) SATURDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-1 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .537 Games against playoff teams: 7

3

NEW YORK
GIANTS

A couple of stopgap veterans and a rookie are called on to toughen up and add depth to a line that was more offensive than effective last season

IN EARLY MARCH the offensive linemen gathered in a cramped, cluttered meeting room at Giants Stadium and vowed to get better. They talked about bonding and continuity, and kept to a minimum the details of how badly they had played the

previous season. Critics had called them soft, injury-prone and largely responsible for the offensive collapse that led to the team's 4-12 record in 2003—and the linemen decided that they could not begin off-season workouts without making a commitment as a group to change that perception. They didn't want to be anybody's whip-

ping boys again. So over the spring and summer, whether they were meeting at the home of guard Rich Seubert for a barbecue or poring over game tapes after conditioning sessions at the stadium, they remained focused on establishing a chemistry within the unit that might serve as an example for their teammates.

Contrary to the media hype, the quarterback competition between rookie Eli Manning and 33-year-old Kurt Warner wasn't the most vital concern of the Giants as they prepared for their first season under new coach Tom Coughlin. It won't matter who's under center if the line isn't a cohesive and efficient part of the offense.

Last year the Giants allowed 44 sacks (tied for second most in the NFL) and averaged 97.4 rushing yards a game (28th in the league). Injuries so ravaged the line that only second-year guard David Diehl started in every game at the same position. This

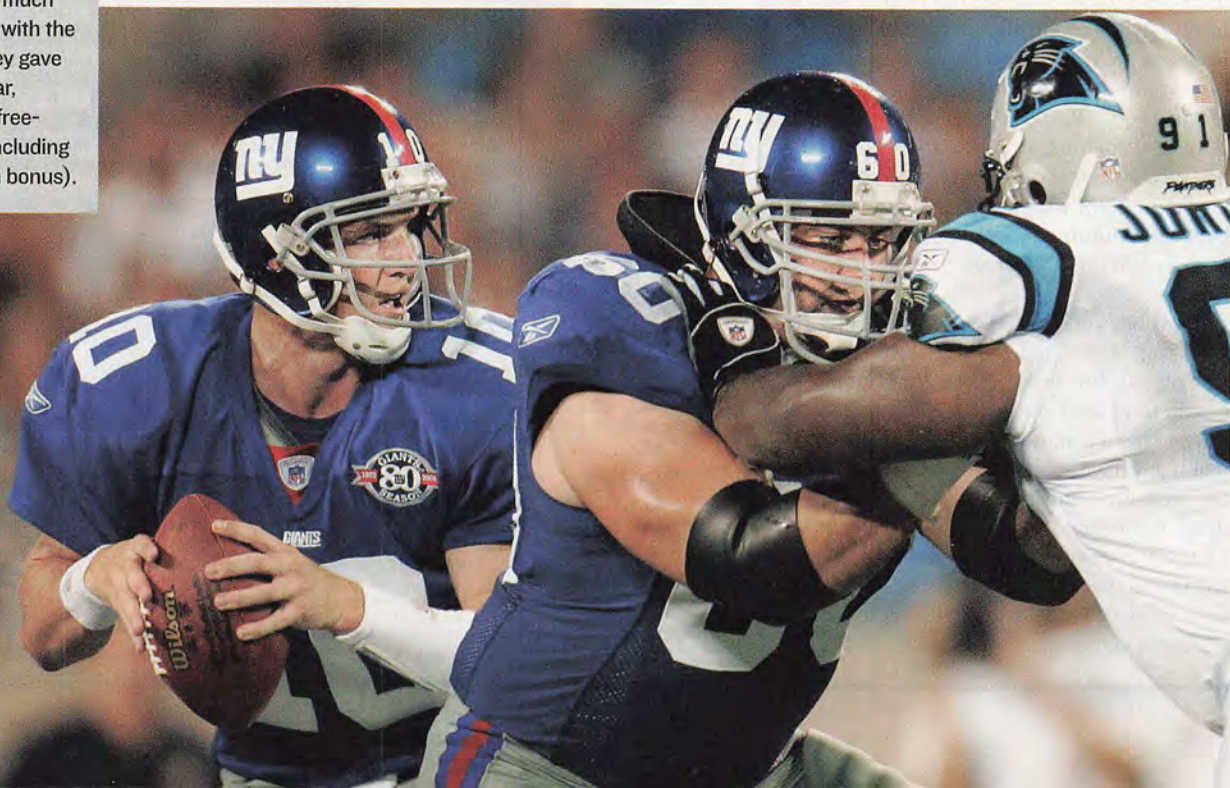
season his linemates figure to include a left tackle who was plagued by a herniated disk in 2003 (Luke Petitgout), an underachieving right tackle (Ian Allen), two free agents (center Shaun O'Hara and guard-tackle Barry Stokes, both former Browns) and the team's second-round pick in this year's draft (guard Chris Snee). "Depth was a big issue last year," says running back Tiki Barber, "and it killed us when guys started getting hurt. Now we've brought in guys with experience and the right attitude. Obviously, they haven't all been together for two or three years, so there are going to be some growing pains, but I'm encouraged by what I've seen so far."

Barber is particularly pleased with Stokes and O'Hara. The 6' 4", 310-pound

BUILDING BLOCKS O'Hara (60) and his linemates have to play better this year or Manning (10) and Warner will get mauled.

PLAYER ON
THE RISE

> Fifth-year outside linebacker **BARRETT GREEN** makes up for his lack of size with athleticism. He's quick and tough enough to be a consistent open-field tackler, and he has the explosiveness to be a disruptive blitz. He impressed the Giants so much when he was with the Lions that they gave him a five-year, \$13.3 million free-agent deal (including a \$2.8 million bonus).



DAMIAN STROMMEYER

Stokes is described by fellow linemen as a high-energy loudmouth who can inspire teammates. The 6' 3", 306-pound O'Hara is soft-spoken and cerebral, and has the demeanor of a natural leader. General manager Ernie Accorsi acknowledges that these two aren't Pro Bowl-caliber additions—O'Hara and Stokes were part of a mediocre line in Cleveland—but he says, "Sometimes you just have to bring in stopgap players, veterans who know how to play."

Joining Stokes and O'Hara in the starting lineup will be Petitgout, who says his back hasn't bothered him since Feb. 1, but there's uncertainty about the other two spots. Seubert's recovery from a broken right leg sustained last October has been slow. Diehl has replaced Allen at right tackle because Snee has shown promise at guard. Diehl, a fifth-round pick in 2003, doesn't have a problem with that scenario, because he played every position except center at Illinois.

The bad news for the Giants is that even if their offensive line does jell, it doesn't necessarily mean the team will be a playoff contender. New York has good skill players—including Barber, wide receiver Amani Toomer and tight end Jeremy Shockey—but the Giants have too many other question marks. For one, neither Manning nor Warner made a particularly convincing case for the starting job in camp. Manning has outstanding potential but still has a lot to learn, while Warner hasn't shown much of the accuracy or confidence that made him a league MVP. The defense will have six new starters, including three new linebackers. On both sides of the ball, the Giants need to have more discipline, which is a big reason management hired a tough, detail-oriented coach like Coughlin. They finished last season with a -16 turnover margin (tied for last in the league last year) and a team-record 127 penalties, and it's those numbers that make Accorsi believe the offensive line received too much blame for last season's implosion. "They weren't the disaster everybody made them out to be," he says.

Even so, the linemen figure they'll be the first unit that critics look at if this season also goes south. "We've taken all the criticism from last year to heart," Diehl says. "And now we want to be known as the strength of the team." —J.C.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

I think they want **Eli Manning** to sit and learn as long as possible, but I wonder how comfortable **Kurt Warner** is going to be in the pocket, in a new offense, with that line in front of him. . . . Their receivers don't scare you, but they're solid. **Amani Toomer** looks as if he's lost weight and has regained some deep speed. **Ike Hilliard** is as tough over the middle as they come, but he's always beat up. . . . On defense, they've got two really good corners. **Will Allen** doesn't have ideal size, but he can make a lot of plays because of his great speed. . . . They've had a lot of changes in their front seven—all three linebackers are gone. **Barrett Green** can really run. **Carlos Emmons** has veteran savvy and leadership skills. There's no dominating player there, but they can all move well. . . . **Michael Strahan** will always be a threat, even without a lot of talent around him. They have too many young defensive ends who haven't proved they can play. The Giants are talking about moving Strahan around a lot, but he's still going to see plenty of double and triple teams. . . . **Tom Coughlin** will have them prepared to play—whether they like him or not.



ALLEN

“Will Allen doesn't have ideal size, but he can make a lot of plays because of his great speed.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 4-12

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 28/11/20

DEFENSE 18/25/22

COACH: Tom Coughlin;
first season with New
York (68-60 in NFL)

TIKI BARBER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
RB	40	278	1,216	4.4	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
69	461	6.7	3		

KURT WARNER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%	RATING
QB	168	65	38	58.5	
YARDS	TDs	INT.			
365	1	1		72.9	

JIM FINN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
FB	349	0	0	—	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
14	115	8.2	0		

BILL GRAMATICA

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	289	6	6
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
3	4	15	

OFFENSE

AMANI TOOMER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
WR	60	63	1,057	5	

JEREMY SHOCKEY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
TE	36	48	535	2	

LUKE PETITGOUT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 6"	310	10	10

BARRY STOKES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	310	13	13

SHAUN O'HARA

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	306	14	14

CHRIS SNEE (R)

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 2"	314	12	12

DAVID DIEHL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	315	16	16

IKE HILLIARD

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
WR	123	60	608	6	

DEFENSE

CARLOS EMMONS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	85	0	0

KEITH WASHINGTON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RE	24	1

FRED ROBBINS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RT	29	1/2

NICK GREISEN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	1	0	0

NORMAN HAND

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LT	10	1

MICHAEL STRAHAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LE	75	18 1/2

BARRETT GREEN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	94	3	0

JEFF FEAGLES

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	90	40.5

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	12 at Philadelphia 19 WASHINGTON 26 CLEVELAND	3 at Green Bay 10 at Dallas 17 Open date 24 DETROIT 31 at Minnesota	7 CHICAGO 14 at Arizona 21 ATLANTA 28 PHILADELPHIA	5 at Washington 12 at Baltimore 18 PITTSBURGH (S) 26 at Cincinnati	2 DALLAS (S) SATURDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 29 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .480 Games against playoff teams: 5

4

DALLAS
COWBOYS

Vinny Testaverde throwing to Keyshawn Johnson? Sounds like 1998 in N.Y., but it's 2004 in Big D as some old Jets try to rev up a sluggish offense

COWBOYS FULLBACK Richie Anderson had his recruiting pitch all set when he spoke to quarterback Vinny Testaverde in late May. Anderson knew the Jets were planning to release Testaverde, so he called his old friend and former New York teammate and told him all that Dallas had to offer. Anderson talked about how comfortable the lifestyle is there compared with New York City. He boasted about the improved talent on the roster and added that the locker room was brimming with excitement for the upcoming season. The only thing Anderson didn't mention was the coach. He knew that he didn't have to sell Testaverde on Bill Parcells.

Testaverde enjoyed the best season of his 18-year career while playing for Par-

JUST VINNY, BABY! Testaverde may be on his last legs—and arm—but Parcells prefers players who know his system.

cells in New York in 1998, and it was that experience that led him to sign with the Cowboys in June. "I'm grateful for this opportunity because I wish I could've played my entire career under [Parcells]," Testaverde says. "He allows you to do your job and not worry about other things. He takes care of the distractions and makes players responsible. I like that because, as the quarterback, all I have to do is run the team and do my job."

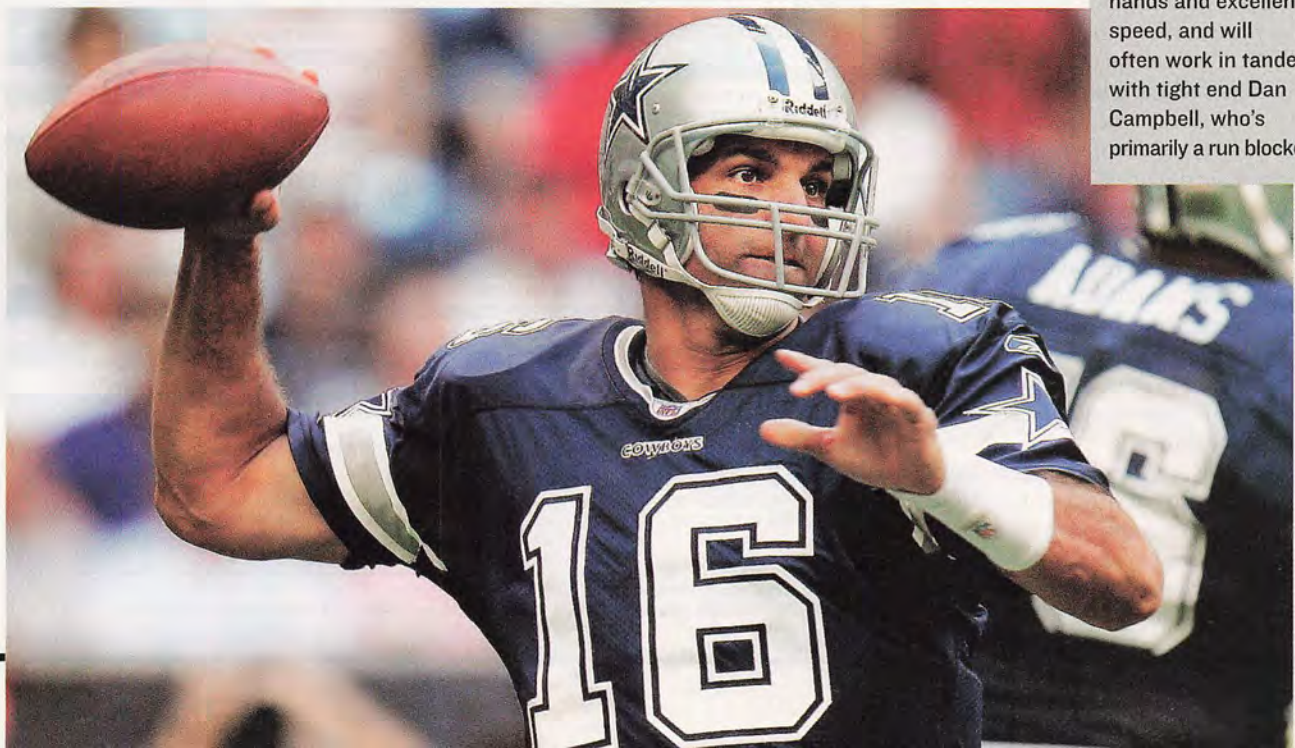
Now the 40-year-old Testaverde, who spent the last two seasons as Chad Pennington's backup, must prove he *can* handle the starting job again, show that he still has some magic in his arm. When Dallas waived former starter Quincy Carter on Aug. 4, Testaverde was left in charge of a team with high expectations following a turnaround season in 2003. After three straight years finishing 5-11, the Cowboys went 10-6 in Parcells's first season and won a wild-card playoff spot.

But Carter, who threw 21 interceptions, was an inconsistent performer, and Testaverde has traits that Parcells wants in his quarterback: a good work ethic in and out of season, plus toughness, passing accuracy and efficient game management.


Testaverde can bring those qualities and more to a huddle, but there are also question marks. Last season he played well—62.1 completion percentage, seven touchdowns, only two interceptions—in seven starts after Pennington broke his wrist, but from 2000 through '02

PLAYER ON
THE RISE

> Second-year tight end **JASON WITTEN** caught 35 passes last season, and Dallas coaches have been working to come up with more ways to get him the ball, such as isolating him against safeties on deep-seam routes. The 6' 5", 257-pound Witten has soft hands and excellent speed, and will often work in tandem with tight end Dan Campbell, who's primarily a run blocker.



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U.S. ARMY

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

he threw 42 interceptions against 39 touchdowns. He also lacks mobility in a division, the NFC East, in which the defensive coordinators of the three other teams—the Eagles' Jim Johnson, the Giants' Tim Lewis and the Redskins' Gregg Williams—love to blitz. Dallas tight end Dan Campbell says, "Vinny's presence puts a greater strain on the offensive line, the tight ends and the backs to keep people off him, but if we can do that, he can be dangerous."

Another challenge is for Testaverde and his new teammates to quickly become familiar with one another's abilities and tendencies. In fact, Cowboys owner Jerry Jones says one reason the decision was made to waive Carter so early in camp was to guarantee that Testaverde got more snaps with the first team. "Some guys are familiar with Vinny, but most of our team doesn't know what he's about," Jones says. "The whole point of training camp is to establish that familiarity as soon as possible."

Testaverde will be counting on two other veterans new to Dallas: wide receiver Keyshawn Johnson, who was acquired in an off-season trade with the Buccaneers for wideout Joey Galloway, and running back Eddie George, who was signed as a free agent after the Titans cut him in a salary-cap move on July 21. Johnson was Testaverde's favorite target when they played together on the Jets in 1998 and '99 and figures to be one of his top receivers again. George rushed for more than 1,000 yards in eight of his nine seasons with Tennessee, including 1,031 last year, and will serve as a role model for second-round pick Julius Jones.

Though new to the Cowboys, players like Testaverde and Johnson are at least old hands in Parcells's system. Shortly after training camp began, Testaverde glanced around the locker room and noted the familiar faces from the Jets team that reached the 1998 AFC Championship Game: Johnson sat in one corner, Anderson stood across the room, and Dedric Ward, competing for the fourth wide receiver spot, was walking nearby. "Seeing all those guys in the same place made me feel comfortable," Testaverde said. "I know these guys. I know how they play. We did some good things in the past, so now we'll see if we can do that again here."

—J.C.

Offensively, their strength is the line. Flozell Adams has the potential to be one of the best left tackles in the business, and Larry Allen's still an imposing run blocker. . . . The Cowboys had average skill players last year, but they've added talent. Rookie back Julius Jones is explosive and probably their only big-play threat. . . . I think Parcells wants to outbig people—play smashmouth football—because he doesn't have great receivers. Keyshawn Johnson is a good possession guy, but Terry Glenn isn't a consistent threat. . . . I can't believe they cut Quincy Carter for Vinny Testaverde. I've heard Drew Henson was lighting it up. . . . La'Roi Glover is as quick as they come at defensive tackle, but there isn't much else on the defensive line. Greg Ellis is a solid end, but they haven't had a dominant pass rusher in a long time. . . . Two of their linebackers, Dexter Coakley and Dat Nguyen, have good instincts and make a lot of plays. . . . The secondary is questionable. Terence Newman is a shut-down guy, but Pete Hunter shouldn't be a starter in this league. . . . This team will have a hard time going 10-6 again.

GLOVER



Rookie running back Julius Jones is explosive and probably their only big-play threat.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 12/17/15
DEFENSE 3/1/1

COACH: Bill Parcells;
second season with Dallas
(148-106-1 in NFL)

EDDIE GEORGE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	80	312	1,031	3.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
22	163	7.4	5	

VINNY TESTAVERDE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	152	198	123	62.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,385	7	2	90.6	

RICHIE ANDERSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	162	70	306	1
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
69	493	7.1	5	

BILLY CUNDIFF

POS.	PVR	Ks MADE	Ks ATT.
K	257	30	31
FG MADE	FG ATT.	Pts.	
23	29	99	

OFFENSE

KEYSHAWN JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	44	45	600	3

JASON WITTEN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	211	35	347	1

FLOZZELL ADAMS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	357	16	16

LARRY ALLEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	335	16	16

AL JOHNSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	303	0	0

ANDRE GURUDE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	326	16	15

JACOB ROGERS (R)

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	305	13	13

TERRY GLENN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	138	52	754	5

DEFENSE

AL SINGLETON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	41	1	2

GREG ELLIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RE	49	8

LA'ROI GLOVER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RT	49	5

DAT NGUYEN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	121	2	0

LEONARDO CARSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LT	18	1½

MARCELLUS WILEY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
LE	51	3	

DEXTER COAKLEY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	96	1	1

PETE HUNTER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	21	1	

DARREN WOODSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	79	1	1

ROY WILLIAMS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	69	2	2

TERENCE NEWMAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	76	4	

MAT MCBRIAR*

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	48	44.8

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (stats for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2002 college stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at Minnesota
19 CLEVELAND
27 at Washington (M)

OCTOBER

3 Open date
10 N.Y. GIANTS
17 PITTSBURGH
24 at Green Bay
31 DETROIT

NOVEMBER

7 at Cincinnati
15 PHILADELPHIA (M)
21 at Baltimore
25 CHICAGO (T)

DECEMBER

6 at Seattle (M)
12 NEW ORLEANS
19 at Philadelphia
26 WASHINGTON

JANUARY

2 at N.Y. Giants
(M) MONDAY
(T) THURSDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 32 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .469 Games against playoff teams: 7

YOU KNOW YOUR TEAM WON.

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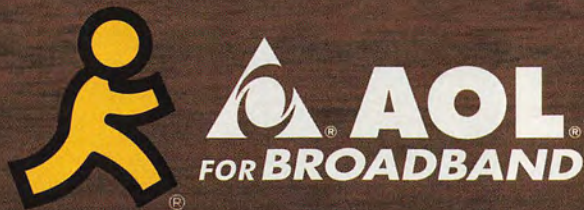
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MINNESOTA VIKINGS

With the addition of a hard-hitting corner, the secondary takes the lead in trying to turn a weak defense that blew a playoff berth into a strength

THE DESPERATION pass floated into the right corner of the end zone at Sun Devil Stadium last December, and as two Vikings defensive backs raced to deflect the ball, Minnesota's season hung perilously in the balance. If one of them gets there in time to stop Josh McCown's fourth-and-25 heave from landing in the hands of Cardinals receiver Nathan Poole, the Vikings win the game and the NFC North, and make the playoffs for the first time since 2000. If they arrive too late, all of the promising strides made by Minnesota in Mike Tice's second full season as coach—such as the 6-0 start and the NFC-best 28 interceptions—fade into the desert.

When Poole caught the ball, dooming the Vikings to a 9-7 finish, cornerback Denard Walker, strong safety Corey Chavous and the rest of the Minnesota secondary became prime suspects in a

criminally negligent collapse. Falling in the final seconds to a team that lost 12 games was, says Vikings assistant secondary coach Kevin Ross, "like a sucker punch to the gut." Though there was plenty of blame to go around, the defensive backs took it the hardest. "It was painful," recalls third-year free safety Brian Russell, who tied for the NFL lead in interceptions with nine, "but as the off-season went on, we learned to turn it into motivation for this year."

When you play defensive back for the

Vikings, your mission is clear: Be proficient enough to allow your offense to outscore the opponent. Quarterback Daunte Culpepper and wideout Randy Moss remain Minnesota's marquee performers; the defensive players they face in practice are attempting to improve their ignominious image. "That was one of the reasons I came here, because I'd heard over the last few years how bad the de-

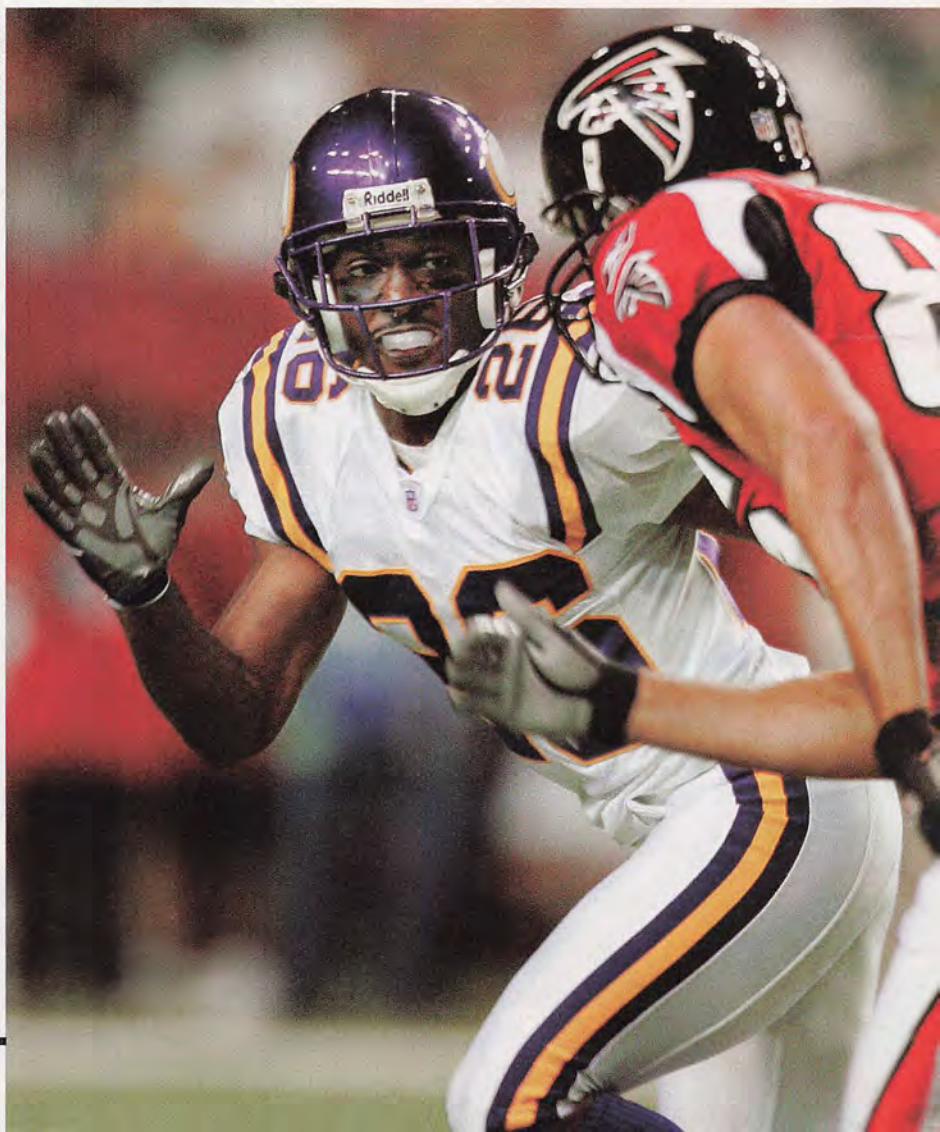
fense was," says cornerback Antoine Winfield, who signed with the Vikings as a free agent in March after five standout seasons with the Bills. "If we can turn our defense into a strength, we'll have a great shot at getting to the Super Bowl."

LITTLE MAN, BIG PLAYS A standout in five seasons in Buffalo, the 5' 9" Winfield will set the tone for a young secondary.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Having played in two Super Bowls, with the Patriots and the Panthers, in his four NFL seasons, tight end **JERMAINE WIGGINS** knows what it's like to shine on the big stage. With defenses locking in on Randy Moss, the Vikings believe Wiggins, whom they signed as a free agent in the off-season, can put up big numbers as a receiving threat underneath.

DAMIAN STROHMEYER



The secondary did make some gains last year, allowing no touchdown passes of 40 yards or more after surrendering six in 2002. Chavous, a former cornerback and noted talent scout (teammates call him Mel Kiper Jr. for his knowledge of the draft), became the first Vikings safety to start in the Pro Bowl since Joey Browner in 1990. "We turned our secondary into a strength by getting all those interceptions," says Chavous. "But we weren't good enough at stopping people [the entire game]."

To bolster the defense, the Vikings released Walker, a free-agent signee in 2003, and gave a six-year, \$34 million contract to Winfield, a tenacious defender whose physical play belies his 5' 9", 180-pound frame. Ted Cottrell, who replaced George O'Leary as defensive coordinator, knows Winfield well, having coached him in Buffalo for two seasons (1999 and 2000). "He is a unique player," Cottrell says of Winfield. "He has great explosion and leaping ability, and because he times his jumps so well, it's hard to throw a ball by him."

Tice also lauds the tackling ability of the team's other starting corner, Brian Williams, a third-year player who, Ross says, "has the most potential of all our defensive backs." The 6' 2", 204-pound Russell, a former quarterback at Penn and San Diego State, is a big hitter and has been censured in practice for taking shots at Moss and other Minnesota receivers.

Once mocked by his teammates as the "token white guy" in the secondary, Russell emerged as an opportunistic playmaker last season. He still could command more respect from teammates—"Russ got a lot of 'punts' last year, high passes that floated right to him, but I love his range and athletic ability," Winfield says—yet he's sufficiently motivated to take out last year's frustrations on the rest of the league. "We're going after it," Russell says. "We want to win it all, and none of us are hiding from that goal."

Tice's job security may hinge on his secondary's performance. He's in the final year of his contract and is reportedly the league's lowest-paid coach. Perhaps haunted by memories of the play that ended last season, he offers only a measured endorsement of his defensive backfield. "I can't say it's going to be a strength," he says. "But they're not bums, either."

—Michael Silver

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

They've done exactly what they needed to do to compete for a division title. They went to town on defense, and they brought in **Ted Cottrell**, who's a heck of a coordinator. With ends **Kenechi Udeze** and **Kenny Mixon**, the front four should be solid. . . . In the secondary I like **Antoine Winfield**. He plays like a guy with a short man's complex: pester you all game and then hit you in the mouth. **Brian Russell** is a little stiff, more of a straight-line guy, and a lot of those interceptions he got last year came on tipped balls. . . . **E.J. Henderson** doesn't have great speed, but he's heady and productive. . . . **Daunte Culpepper** has leveled off. He's also very streaky. He can make bad plays at costly times, but when he's hot, look out. . . . **Marcus Robinson** will help take some heat off **Randy Moss**. You can't let Moss get behind you, and you have to bang him when he catches the short ball. The man will stand there and watch sometimes, but when he turns up the juice, he's scary. . . . Their center [**Matt Birk**] and both their tackles [**Mike Rosenthal** and **Bryant McKinnie**] are good players, and that's why they get away with having average guards.



HENDERSON

“Daunte Culpepper is streaky and can make bad plays at costly times, but when he's hot, look out.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 9-7

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 4/4/1

DEFENSE 17/26/23

COACH: Mike Tice;
fourth season with
Minnesota (15-18 in NFL)

MICHAEL BENNETT				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	38	90	447	5.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
12	132	11.0	1	

DAUNTE CULPEPPER				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	14	454	295	65.0
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,479	25	11	96.4	

JIM KLEINSASSER				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
TE	197	2	15	7.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
46	401	8.7	4	

AARON ELLING				
POS.	PVR	XP's MADE	XP's ATT.	
K	223	48	48	
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.		
18	25	102		

OFFENSE

RANDY MOSS				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	8	111	1,632	17

JERMAINE WIGGINS				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	285	8	80	1

BRYANT MCKINNIE				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 8"	346	16	16

CHRIS LIWIENSKI				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	325	16	16

MATT BIRK				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	300	16	16

DAVID DIXON				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	343	16	16

MIKE ROSENTHAL				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	310	16	16

NATE BURLESON				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	128	29	455	2

DEFENSE

CHRIS CLAIBORNE				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	80	3	1	

KENECHI UDEZE (R)				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
RE	56	16½		

CHRIS HOVAN				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
RT	27	2		

E.J. HENDERSON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
MLB	17	0	0	

KEVIN WILLIAMS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
LT	52	10½		

KENNY MIXON				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
LE	53	5		

DONTARRIOUS THOMAS (R)				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
OLB	75	0	1	

BRIAN WILLIAMS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	54	5		

COREY CHAVOUS				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
SS	85	0	8	

BRIAN RUSSELL				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
FS	87	1	9	

ANTOINE WINFIELD				
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.	
CB	109	1		

DARREN BENNETT				
POS.	PUNTS	AVG.		
P	82	41.9		

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
12 DALLAS	3 Open date	8 at Indianapolis (M)	5 at Chicago	2 at Washington
20 at Philadelphia (M)	10 at Houston	14 at Green Bay	12 SEATTLE	
26 CHICAGO	17 at New Orleans	21 DETROIT	19 at Detroit	
	24 TENNESSEE	28 JACKSONVILLE	24 GREEN BAY (F)	
	31 N.Y. GIANTS			

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-21 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .496 Games against playoff teams: 6

2

GREEN BAY
PACKERS

With time running out on the league's best quarterback-running back combo, it may be now or never for Brett Favre, Ahman Green & Co.

PLAYER ON
THE RISE

> Third-year man **NAJEH DAVENPORT** is emerging as the best backup running back in the NFC. As a rookie the 6' 1" 250-pounder out of Miami, where he also excelled in track, averaged more yards per carry (5.45) than every other NFL back (minimum 75 attempts) except Clinton Portis at 5.49. Coach Mike Sherman plans to platoon him with Ahman Green.

THE PACKERS let a golden opportunity slip away last year when they blew an elementary pass coverage on fourth-and-26 late in their NFC divisional game at Philadelphia and allowed the Eagles to tie a game they would eventually win in

overtime. That would be a horrible loss for any team, but for Green Bay it was devastating. There is no team right now with a quarterback-running back combination as prolific as Brett Favre and Ahman Green. And while many teams talk about having a narrow window to win, the Packers mean it because Favre could retire any year

and running backs who take as much punishment as Green have a short life expectancy in the league. That's why Green Bay has to play every year as if it may be the last stand for two great offensive weapons.

"We've got to develop a take-charge defense," says new defensive coordinator Bob Slowik, who replaced Ed Donatell after the Philadelphia debacle, "so we can take advantage of the time we have left with those guys."

Favre, who turns 35 next month, has shown some signs of decline—against the Eagles he threw an interception on the Packers' first possession in overtime, which led to the Eagles' game-winning field goal—but he still is one of the league's top quarterbacks. Favre's .654 completion percentage last year was his career best, and his 32 touchdown passes led the league. Green's 1,883 yards would have


won the NFL rushing title in 77 of the previous 84 seasons, but his outstanding season was overshadowed by Baltimore's Jamal Lewis, who rushed for 2,066 yards. Former general manager Ron Wolf acquired Green from Seattle for cornerback Fred Vinson in 2000, Green has led all NFL backs with 5,685 rushing yards and 7,598 total yards.

The addition of Green has been a god-send for Favre. Because defenses have to spend so much energy accounting for and focusing on the speed, power and elusiveness of Green, and because Favre is getting such good protection from his line, Favre has taken much less of a beating (through he did fracture his right thumb in the seventh game last season)

ELITE DUO The luxury of handing off to Green has made Favre, who will turn 35 next month, even more dangerous.



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See important safety information below and Patient Information on following page.

Cialis is not for everyone. If you take nitrates, often used for chest pain (also known as angina), or alpha-blockers (other than Flomax 0.4 mg once daily), prescribed for prostate problems or high blood pressure, do not take Cialis. Such combinations could cause a sudden, unsafe drop in blood pressure. Don't drink alcohol in excess (to a level of intoxication) with Cialis. This combination may increase your chances of getting dizzy or lowering your blood pressure. Cialis does not protect a man or his partner from sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

The most common side effects with Cialis were headache and upset stomach. Backache and muscle ache were also reported, sometimes with delayed onset. Most men weren't bothered by the side effects enough to stop taking Cialis. Although a rare occurrence, men who experience an erection for more than 4 hours (priapism) should seek immediate medical attention. Discuss your medical conditions and medications with your doctor to ensure Cialis is right for you and that you are healthy enough for sexual activity.

**In clinical trials, Cialis was shown to improve, up to 36 hours after dosing, the ability of men with ED to have a single successful intercourse attempt.*

Cialis® is a registered trademark of Lilly ICOS LLC
Flomax® (tamsulosin HCl) is a registered trademark of Boehringer Ingelheim

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Read the Patient Information about CIALIS before you start taking it and again each time you get a refill. There may be new information. You may also find it helpful to share this information with your partner. This leaflet does not take the place of talking with your doctor. You and your doctor should talk about CIALIS when you start taking it and at regular checkups. If you do not understand the information, or have questions, talk with your doctor or pharmacist.

What important information should you know about CIALIS?

CIALIS can cause your blood pressure to drop suddenly to an unsafe level if it is taken with certain other medicines. You could get dizzy, faint, or have a heart attack or stroke.

Do not take CIALIS if you:

- take any medicines called "nitrates."
- use recreational drugs called "poppers" like amyl nitrate and butyl nitrate.
- take medicines called alpha blockers, other than Flomax® (tamsulosin HCl) 0.4 mg daily. (See "Who should not take CIALIS?")

Tell all your healthcare providers that you take CIALIS. If you need emergency medical care for a heart problem, it will be important for your healthcare provider to know when you last took CIALIS.

After taking a single tablet, some of the active ingredient of CIALIS remains in your body for more than 2 days. The active ingredient can remain longer if you have problems with your kidneys or liver, or you are taking certain other medications (see "Can other medications affect CIALIS?").

What is CIALIS?

CIALIS is a prescription medicine taken by mouth for the treatment of erectile dysfunction (ED) in men.

ED is a condition where the penis does not harden and expand when a man is sexually excited, or when he cannot keep an erection. A man who has trouble getting or keeping an erection should see his doctor for help if the condition bothers him. CIALIS may help a man with ED get and keep an erection when he is sexually excited.

CIALIS does not:

- cure ED
- increase a man's sexual desire
- protect a man or his partner from sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Speak to your doctor about ways to guard against sexually transmitted diseases.
- serve as a male form of birth control

CIALIS is only for men with ED. CIALIS is not for women or children. CIALIS must be used only under a doctor's care.

How does CIALIS work?

When a man is sexually stimulated, his body's normal physical response is to increase blood flow to his penis. This results in an erection. CIALIS helps increase blood flow to the penis and may help men with ED get and keep an erection satisfactory for sexual activity. Once a man has completed sexual activity, blood flow to his penis decreases, and his erection goes away.

Who can take CIALIS?

Talk to your doctor to decide if CIALIS is right for you.

CIALIS has been shown to be effective in men over the age of 18 years who have erectile dysfunction, including men with diabetes or who have undergone prostatectomy.

Who should not take CIALIS?

Do not take CIALIS if you:

- take any medicines called "nitrates" (See "What important information should you know about CIALIS?"). Nitrates are commonly used to treat angina. Angina is a symptom of heart disease and can cause pain in your chest, jaw, or down your arm.

Medicines called nitrates include nitroglycerin that is found in tablets, sprays, ointments, pastes, or patches. Nitrates can also be found in other medicines such as isosorbide dinitrate or isosorbide mononitrate. Some recreational drugs called "poppers" also contain nitrates, such as amyl nitrate and butyl nitrate. Do not use CIALIS if you are using these drugs. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure if any of your medicines are nitrates.

- take medicines called "alpha blockers", other than Flomax® 0.4 mg daily. Alpha blockers are sometimes prescribed for prostate problems or high blood pressure. If CIALIS is taken with alpha blockers other than Flomax® 0.4 mg daily, your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe level. You could get dizzy and faint.
- you have been told by your healthcare provider to not have sexual activity because of health problems. Sexual activity can put an extra strain on your heart, especially if your heart is already weak from a heart attack or heart disease.
- are allergic to CIALIS or any of its ingredients. The active ingredient in CIALIS is called tadalafil. See the end of this leaflet for a complete list of ingredients.

What should you discuss with your doctor before taking CIALIS?

Before taking CIALIS, tell your doctor about all your medical problems, including if you:

- have heart problems such as angina, heart failure, irregular heartbeats, or have had a heart attack. Ask your doctor if it is safe for you to have sexual activity.
- have low blood pressure or have high blood pressure that is not controlled
- have had a stroke
- have liver problems
- have kidney problems or require dialysis
- have retinitis pigmentosa, a rare genetic (runs in families) eye disease
- have stomach ulcers
- have a bleeding problem
- have a deformed penis shape or Peyronie's disease
- have had an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- have blood cell problems such as sickle cell anemia, multiple myeloma, or leukemia

Can other medications affect CIALIS?

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. CIALIS and other medicines may affect each other. Always check with your doctor before starting or stopping any medicines. Especially tell your doctor if you take any of the following:

- medicines called nitrates (See "What important information should you know about CIALIS?")
- medicines called alpha blockers. These include Hytrin® (terazosin HCl), Flomax® (tamsulosin HCl), Cardura® (doxazosin mesylate), Minipress® (prazosin HCl) or Uroxatral® (alfuzosin HCl).
- ritonavir (Norvir®) or indinavir (Crixivan®)
- ketoconazole or itraconazole (such as Nizoral® or Sporanox®)
- erythromycin
- other medicines or treatments for ED

How should you take CIALIS?

Take CIALIS exactly as your doctor prescribes. CIALIS comes in different doses (5 mg, 10 mg, and 20 mg). For most men, the recommended starting dose is 10 mg. **CIALIS should be taken no more than once a day.** Some men can only take a low dose of CIALIS because of medical conditions or medicines they take. Your doctor will prescribe the dose that is right for you.

- If you have kidney problems, your doctor may start you on a lower dose of CIALIS.
- If you have kidney or liver problems or you are taking certain medications, your doctor may limit your highest dose of CIALIS to 10 mg and may also limit you to one tablet in 48 hours (2 days) or one tablet in 72 hours (3 days).

Take one CIALIS tablet before sexual activity. In some patients, the ability to have sexual activity was improved at 30 minutes after taking CIALIS when compared to a sugar pill. The ability to have sexual activity was improved up to 36 hours after taking CIALIS when compared to a sugar pill. You and your doctor should consider this in deciding when you should take CIALIS prior to sexual activity. Some form of sexual stimulation is needed for an erection to happen with CIALIS. CIALIS may be taken with or without meals.

Do not change your dose of CIALIS without talking to your doctor. Your doctor may lower your dose or raise your dose, depending on how your body reacts to CIALIS.

Do not drink alcohol to excess when taking CIALIS (for example, 5 glasses of wine or 5 shots of whiskey). When taken in excess, alcohol can increase your chances of getting a headache or getting dizzy, increasing your heart rate, or lowering your blood pressure.

If you take too much CIALIS, call your doctor or emergency room right away.

What are the possible side effects of CIALIS?

The most common side effects with CIALIS are headache, indigestion, back pain, muscle aches, flushing, and stuffy or runny nose. These side effects usually go away after a few hours. Patients who get back pain and muscle aches usually get it 12 to 24 hours after taking CIALIS. Back pain and muscle aches usually go away by themselves within 48 hours. Call your doctor if you get a side effect that bothers you or one that will not go away.

CIALIS may uncommonly cause:

- an erection that won't go away (priapism). If you get an erection that lasts more than 4 hours, get medical help right away. Priapism must be treated as soon as possible or lasting damage can happen to your penis including the inability to have erections.
- vision changes, such as seeing a blue tinge to objects or having difficulty telling the difference between the colors blue and green.

These are not all the side effects of CIALIS. For more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

How should CIALIS be stored?

- Store CIALIS at room temperature between 59° and 86°F (15° and 30°C).
- Keep CIALIS and all medicines out of the reach of children.

General Information about CIALIS:

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for conditions other than those described in patient information leaflets. Do not use CIALIS for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give CIALIS to other people, even if they have the same symptoms that you have. It may harm them.

This leaflet summarizes the most important information about CIALIS. If you would like more information, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about CIALIS that is written for health professionals.

For more information you can also visit www.cialis.com, or call 1-877-242-5471.

What are the ingredients of CIALIS?

Active Ingredient: tadalafil

Inactive Ingredients: croscarmellose sodium, hydroxypropyl cellulose, hypromellose, iron oxide, lactose monohydrate, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, sodium lauryl sulfate, talc, titanium dioxide, and triacetin.

Rx only

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in recent years. In the four seasons before Green's arrival, Favre was sacked 138 times. In Green's four years Favre has been sacked 100 times.

"I know there aren't many years left for me," Favre says. "I do know if I stay healthy and Ahman does, we've got a heck of a shot to win it all. We had such confidence at the end of last year. We felt as if we could beat anybody. The thing I think we're all focused on this year is getting home field advantage throughout the playoffs. It means so much, especially here. No one here thinks we would have lost to Philadelphia if the game was in Green Bay."

Favre doesn't put a timetable on his retirement because he changes his mind about it so much. When he has to leave his 465-acre ranch in Hattiesburg, Miss., to go to training camp, the pull to stay home is a mighty one. In his younger, partying years, Favre couldn't wait to globetrot, but nowadays it takes a lot to get him off his riding mower. "People come by my house and stare," he says. "They say, 'I ain't never seen no NFL quarterback cut grass.' Hey, maybe there's something wrong with me, but I love mowing the lawn." One day at practice last month Favre found his mind wandering back to Hattiesburg, thinking about two things: trying to figure a way to outsmart the beavers who were damming his lake and adding another feeding station for the herd of deer he has on his property.

"I have the best of both worlds right now—Mississippi in the off-season and the fun of Sundays during the season," he said. "I still love playing. And there's no doubt in my mind I can lead this team to the Super Bowl, and win it."

Favre is one of only five players remaining from the team that won the Super Bowl in January 1997. Now many of Favre's teammates are using a win-one-for-Brett motto as a motivating force. "I've got a sense of urgency to win a Super Bowl for Brett," says linebacker Na'il Diggs. "I'm going to try my damndest to win it for him before it's his time to go."

Favre smiled when Diggs's message was relayed to him. "That's the first I've heard of that, but that's nice," he said. "I'll take that sentiment from Diggsy over any award I've ever won. I love this team. I love these guys. I think we all know we've got a real chance this year." —P.K.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

Brett Favre seems like he's getting more careless, but there's still no one I'd rather have in a pressure game. . . . No other team has a better one-two rushing combination than **Ahman Green** and **Najeh Davenport**. Someday Davenport might win a rushing title. . . . They have a superior offensive line, except **Mark Tauscher** can be bull-rushed effectively at right tackle. . . . There are times **Javon Walker** looks like a star, but he's not disciplined enough as a route-runner. . . . On defense, now that Gilbert Brown is gone, I'd be worried about the productivity of **Cletidus Hunt** and **Grady Jackson** on the inside. They're immature guys, although Jackson was great against the run down the stretch. . . . **Nick Barnett** is going to be one of the best linebackers in the league when he gets better in cover situations. He's very instinctive, fast and strong. . . . I worry about the secondary, with the **Mike McKenzie** holdout and **Al Harris** blowing too many coverages on the other side. I'd start at least one of the rookies, **Joey Thomas** or **Ahmad Carroll**. Thomas is a big kid who, even though he played at Montana State, is very NFL-ready.



BARNETT

“There are times Javon Walker looks like a star, but he's not disciplined enough as a route runner.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 3/16/4

DEFENSE 10/23/17

COACH: Mike Sherman;
fifth season with Green
Bay (45-24 in NFL)

AHMAN GREEN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	4	355	1,883	15
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
50	367	7.3	5	

BRETT FAVRE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	29	471	308	65.4
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,361	32	21	90.4	

WILLIAM HENDERSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	275	0	0	—
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
24	214	8.9	3	

RYAN LONGWELL

POS.	PVR	Ks	FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.
K	144	51	51		
23	26	120			

OFFENSE

ROBERT FERGUSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	118	38	520	4

BUBBA FRANKS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	73	30	241	4

CHAD CLIFTON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	330	16	16

MIKE WAHLE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 6"	307	16	16

MIKE FLANAGAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	297	16	16

MARCO RIVERA

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	310	16	16

MARK TAUSCHER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 4"	320	16	16

DONALD DRIVER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	94	52	621	2

DEFENSE

HANNIBAL NAVIES

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	86	1	0

KABEER GBAJA-BIAMILA

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	47	10	

CLETIDUS HUNT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	36	4	

NICK BARNETT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	109	2	3

GRADY JACKSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	23	2½	

AARON KAMPMAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	30	2	

NA'IL DIGGS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	87	1	2

B.J. SANDER (R)

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	82	43.3

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

13 at Carolina (M)
19 CHICAGO
26 at Indianapolis

OCTOBER

3 N.Y. GIANTS
11 TENNESSEE (M)
17 at Detroit
24 DALLAS
31 at Washington

NOVEMBER

7 Open date
14 MINNESOTA
21 at Houston
29 ST. LOUIS (M)

DECEMBER

5 at Philadelphia
12 DETROIT
19 JACKSONVILLE
24 at Minnesota (F)

JANUARY

2 at Chicago

(M) MONDAY
(F) FRIDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-16** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.508** Games against playoff teams: **4**

3

DETROIT
LIONS

Quarterback Joey Harrington has been surrounded with talented, young skill players, but it will be at least a year before this team makes a jump

HOW BAD was the Lions' offense last season? Shawn Bryson was the leading rusher with only 606 yards, and he led the team in receptions with 54. The Rams' Torry Holt caught more passes (117) than Detroit's top three wideouts combined (107). In only four games did the Lions score more than 17 points. Statistically—and in every other imaginable way—Detroit had the NFL's worst offense for what seemed to be the 57th year in a row.

Quarterback Joey Harrington, who was supposed to be a savior when Detroit selected him No. 3 overall in the 2002 draft, tried to be diplomatic about the offense's predicament one day at training camp. "In the last two years there wasn't much that could go wrong that didn't," he said. "By about Week 8 each year, we were calling guys [who were out of the league] and asking, 'Hey, you want to come and play for us?'"

Chargers, and guard-center Damien Woody, who started on two Super Bowl winners with the Patriots—plus wideout Tai Streets, who caught 119 passes opposite Terrell Owens with the 49ers over the last two seasons.

The Lions believe they now have the young skill players the 25-year-old Harrington needs to make the offense work in his third season, the point at which NFL

quarterbacks usually sink or swim. Receivers Williams, 22, and Charles Rogers, 23, are big, fast and physical. Jones, 22, is a physical back with breakaway speed. At 28 Alexander, who missed most of last season with a groin injury, is still young

IN A RUSH TO PLAY Bringing speed and toughness to the backfield, Jones is the breakaway threat the Lions have lacked.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Finally taking his conditioning and weight training seriously, defensive tackle **SHAUN ROGERS** arrived at camp more sculpted than soft. The Lions think the 6' 4", 345-pounder could at last be the run-stopping, pass-rushing tackle they thought they had drafted in the second round in 2001. His strength and quick feet could make him a Sapp-type presence.

Help has arrived. The Lions probably did a better job of adding offensive weapons in the off-season than any other team. In the first round of the draft they got the top-rated players on their board at wide receiver (Roy Williams of Texas, a burner with great hands) and running back (Kevin Jones, who rushed for 1,647 yards and 21 touchdowns at Virginia Tech last season). Detroit also signed two players at the top of its free-agent wish list—tight end Stephen Alexander, a strong blocker from the



enough to be an effective blocker and catch 45 to 50 passes.

As Detroit knows firsthand, potential doesn't always translate into success in the NFL—Lions first-round picks Andre Ware, Reggie Brown and Bryant Westbrook were flops—but for a team that has won only one playoff game since 1957, there is reason for hope.

"What I'm really looking forward to is having a consistent group of guys we can build with," says Harrington. "Last year I got benched because I was forcing the ball. We weren't scoring, and I felt the pressure to make plays. But this year I really feel we're going to start building something with a group of young guys any team in the league would like to have."

In practice that afternoon Harrington wisely did not force the ball to his primary receiver on four pass plays during a long touchdown drive. Instead, he looked off the receiver and dumped the ball to a back or tight end. "We went 80 yards, didn't we?" Harrington said afterward. "And we scored. I think it's going to make me more efficient, when defenses know I'm not going to force it downfield to try to make something happen."

The Lions made no bones about what was expected from the young players. Williams and Rogers were lining up with the first unit early into camp, and Jones was splitting time with Bryson and speedy second-year back Artose Pinner. "It's not just the speed that the new guys bring," says coach Steve Mariucci. "It's the explosion. Rogers, Williams and Jones can break tackles."

Mariucci is realistic. This is a rebuilding year for his team. Maybe next year the Lions will be playoff contenders. "We're still a work in progress," he says. "The last couple of years this team has gone through the learning curve. Now, watching them, it's like they're coming out of the woods."

Sitting in his office at the team's practice facility, Mariucci pulled out a small sign that read SEMPRE AVANTI. "Always forward," he said. "My dad gave it to me. It doesn't do any good to dwell on the failure of the past. Forward. I've been around Terrell Owens and Jerry Rice and Steve Young, and I saw it happen in San Francisco. I know what it takes to win. And we'll win here."

—P.K.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

The thing I like about the Lions is they have winning coaches. **Steve Mariucci** convinces guys they can win. I love the addition of **Dick Jauron** as defensive coordinator; he's one of the smartest guys in the game, and players love playing for him. **Pat Morris** is the best line coach in football; he could turn **Jeff Backus** from a good left tackle into a great one. . . . The jury's out on **Joey Harrington**, but I have a feeling he'll be good enough, especially with **Roy Williams** stretching the field. . . . **Kevin Jones** is going to be one of the best backs in the league for a long time. He has great field vision, is very tough and has very good speed. . . . **Shaun Rogers** could be a great rushing defensive tackle who can hold the point on the run. The question is, Will he play hard all the time? . . . **Dre' Bly** is overrated because he can be beat deep, but he's their best corner. That tells me the rebuilding there isn't over by a long shot. . . . Does any team have a better kicker than **Jason Hanson**? He missed only one field goal last year.



BACKUS

Dre' Bly is overrated because he can be beat deep, but he's their best corner.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 32/24/32
DEFENSE 15/28/24

COACH: Steve Mariucci;
second season with
Detroit (62-50 in NFL)

KEVIN JONES (R)

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	43	281	1,647	5.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
14	161	11.5	21	

JOEY HARRINGTON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	82	554	309	55.8
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,880	17	22	63.9	

CORY SCHLESINGER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	310	9	16	1.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
34	247	7.3	2	

JASON HANSON

POS.	PVR	XPs MADE	XPs ATT.
K	167	26	27
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
22	23	92	

OFFENSE

CHARLES ROGERS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	62	22	243	3

STEPHEN ALEXANDER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	286	0	0	0

JEFF BACKUS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	305	16	16

DAVID LOVERNE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	303	1	0

DONIC RAIOLA

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 1"	295	16	16

DAMIEN WOODY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	320	14	14

STOCKAR MCDUGGLE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	335	16	16

ROY WILLIAMS (R)

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	147	70	1,079	9

DEFENSE

DONTE' CURRY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	1	0	0

KALIMBA EDWARDS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	16	2	

SHAUN ROGERS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	58	4	

EARL HOLMES

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	97	2	0

DAN WILKINSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	25	2	

JAMES HALL

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	62	4½	

JAMES DAVIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	6	0	0



DRE' BLY

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	60	6	

BRIAN WALKER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	80	0	2

BROCK MARION

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	81	0	3

FERNANDO BRYANT

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	70	1	

NICK HARRIS

POS.	POINTS	AVG.
P	63	40.2

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
12 at Chicago 19 HOUSTON 26 PHILADELPHIA	3 Open date 10 at Atlanta 17 GREEN BAY 24 at N.Y. Giants 31 at Dallas	7 WASHINGTON 14 at Jacksonville 21 at Minnesota 25 INDIANAPOLIS (T)	5 ARIZONA 12 at Green Bay 19 MINNESOTA 26 CHICAGO	2 at Tennessee (T) THURSDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-1 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .537 Games against playoff teams: 4

4 CHICAGO BEARS

New coach Lovie Smith delivers an aggressive, opportunistic defensive scheme that should make star linebacker Brian Urlacher even better

LOVIE SMITH remembers the precise moment he wanted to be Brian Urlacher's coach. It was Sept. 10, 2000, at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, and Urlacher was playing in his second NFL game. Smith, then the Buccaneers' linebackers coach, was standing on the sideline when the Bears' rookie middle linebacker announced himself with a bone-jarring thud. "They threw him into the game, and almost immediately we ran a toss play," Smith recalls. "The back turned the corner right in front of me, and Brian came flying out of nowhere, beat a block and smacked the guy along the sideline. I just remember thinking, *Man, if I only had this guy.* Because I knew how good he'd be in a system like ours."

Four years later Smith has a chance to

BEAR HUG Though Urlacher suffered a drop-off in big-play performance last year, he still led Chicago with 115 tackles.

fulfill his fantasy. In taking over a Chicago team that finished 7-9 in 2003, a second consecutive losing season that led to the firing of Dick Jauron, Smith has no illusions about which player holds the key to the Bears' immediate fortunes. With a starting quarterback, Rex Grossman, who has played in three games, Chicago will have to win with defense. That means Urlacher, whom many Bears fans hail as the heir to Hall of Famers Bill George, Dick Butkus and Mike Singletary, will be under increased pressure to produce.

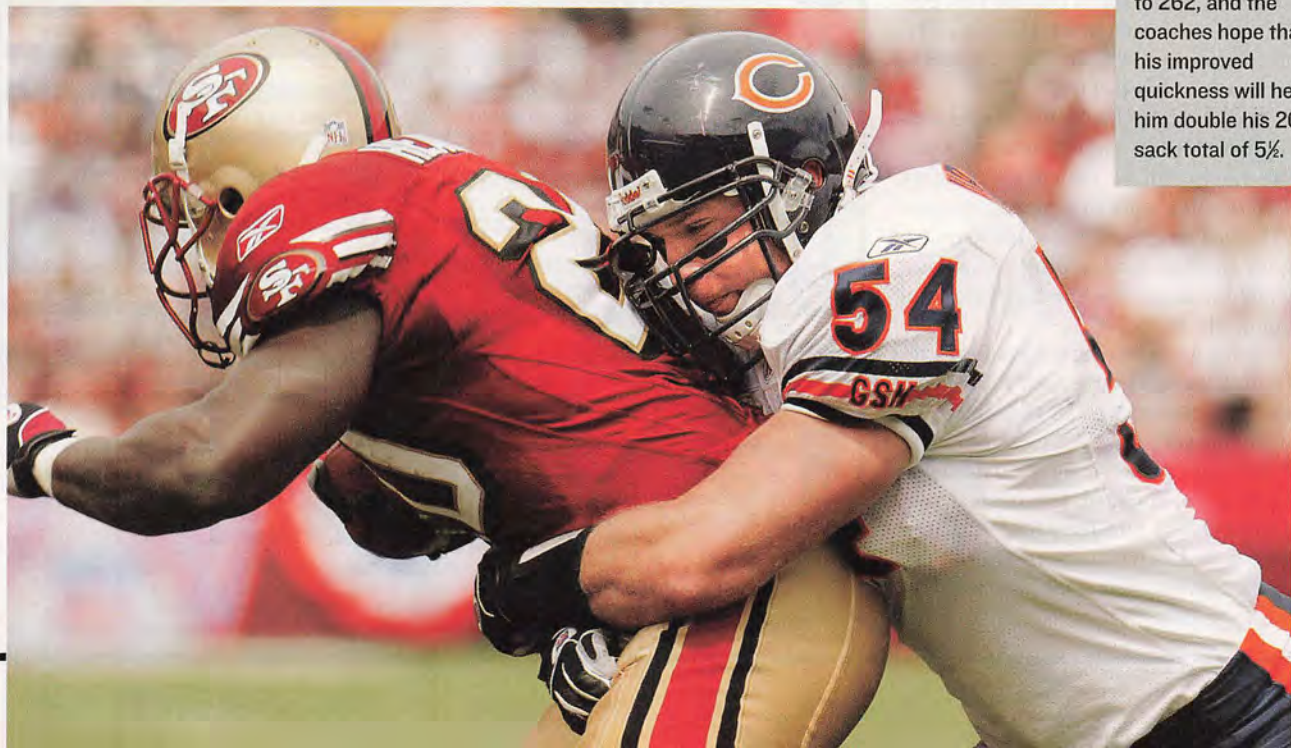
Though he led the team in tackles (115) in 2003 and made the Pro Bowl for a fourth consecutive season, Urlacher lacked his usual penchant for big plays. He had a career-low 2½ sacks and went without an interception, forced fumble or fumble recovery. He attracted more attention for an alleged romantic liaison with Paris Hilton (the notorious heiress was spotted in Urlacher's luxury box during the Bears'

38-23 loss to the Packers on *Monday Night Football* last September) than for any play he made on the field.

Urlacher figures to enjoy a simple life under the guidance of Smith, who, as the Rams' defensive coordinator in 2003, presided over a defense that forced a league-high 46 turnovers (tied for the NFL's second highest single-season total in a decade). With a pair of promising rookie defensive tackles in Tommie Harris and Tank Johnson, Smith envisions a fast, aggressive unit that swarms to the ball without getting bogged down by

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> The Bears had a league-low 18 sacks last season, but defensive end **ALEX BROWN** was one of the few bright spots along the line. At the behest of new coach Lovie Smith and defensive coordinator Ron Rivera, Brown dropped 20 pounds, to 262, and the coaches hope that his improved quickness will help him double his 2003 sack total of 5½.



assignments, all within the context of the Cover 2 scheme that Smith has favored since his days under Tony Dungy in Tampa.

"The total team atmosphere has changed," says cornerback Jerry Azumah. "There's a new attitude, new style and new life around here. Brian, in particular, is energized, because Lovie's going to bring out the best in him and will put him in a better position to make plays. It's going to be Brian's defense, basically."

It's no coincidence that Smith tabbed former Bears linebacker Ron Rivera as his defensive coordinator and brought in Hardy Nickerson, who excelled at the position for the Buccaneers, as a special training camp assistant. "Everything in this defense is defined, so it's easy for a middle linebacker to thrive," Nickerson says. "You know where you're supposed to be, so all you have to do is just go get the ball."

Raring to go since he learned of Smith's hiring, Urlacher suffered a severe right hamstring pull in the first practice at training camp. At press time Urlacher was still sidelined, but he was scheduled to be back in time for the Bears' opener. The ever-optimistic Smith proclaimed the setback to be an opportunity for other players to shine, especially hard-hitting second-year linebacker Lance Briggs, who was shifted from the weak side to the middle during Urlacher's absence.

If young players like Briggs, Harris, Johnson and defensive end Alex Brown continue to improve, they'll join a nucleus of veteran defenders (along with defensive end Adewale Ogunleye, the AFC sack leader last season who was acquired in an Aug. 21 trade with the Dolphins) who led the Bears to a 13-3 record in 2001. But beginning with a humbling home playoff defeat to the Eagles that year, Chicago has gone 11-22 since. If the Bears hope to reverse their course in 2004, they'll have to be Monsters of the Midway once more.

"With a new offensive system, it's going to take them awhile to get the timing down," says veteran safety Mike Brown. "As a defense, we know we're probably going to have to play at a high level until the offense can catch up, and that all starts with Brian."

That's just fine with Smith, who says, "I've had this vision for a long time."

—M.S.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

If you consider that they won the division three years ago with many of the same guys, you'd have to say they have a lot of potential. It's a talented group on defense; the question is how quickly they can transition into **Lovie Smith's** scheme. . . . The key for this defense is the two young tackles, **Tommie Harris** and **Tank Johnson**, because they have to keep the heat off **Brian Urlacher**. . . . **Charles Tillman** had a good rookie year, but they set things up for him so he always had help. The Cover 2 scheme is similar, so he should continue to develop. . . . **Mike Brown** is a special player. He's not the biggest and not the fastest, but he's always around the ball making plays. And one of the other safeties, **Mike Green**, covers even better than Brown does. . . . **Rex Grossman** is a typical Steve Spurrier quarterback: He doesn't have real good arm strength or mobility, but he's smart, gets rid of the ball in a hurry and puts it in the right places. . . . **Thomas Jones** jumps out at me, because of his versatility. Last year with Tampa Bay he showed what he's all about—a guy who not only can take it to the house but also can run inside and catch the ball.

JONES



Mike Brown is a special player—not the biggest or the fastest, but he's always around the ball.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 7-9

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 18/30/28

DEFENSE 16/13/14

COACH: Lovie Smith; first season as an NFL head coach

THOMAS JONES

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	56	137	627	4.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
24	180	7.5	3	

REX GROSSMAN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	114	72	38	52.8
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
437	2	1	74.8	

BRYAN JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	362	2	5	2.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
9	71	7.9	0	

PAUL EDINGER

POS.	PVR	XP's MADE	XP's ATT.	
K	259	27	27	
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.		
26	36	105		

OFFENSE

DAVID TERRELL

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	154	43	361	1

DESMOND CLARK

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	199	44	433	2

QASIM MITCHELL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 6"	355	2	2

RUBEN BROWN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	300	15	15

OLIN KREUTZ

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	292	16	16

MIKE GANDY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	325	14	14

JOHN TAIT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	323	16	16

BOBBY WADE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	237	12	137	0

DEFENSE

JOE ODOM

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	20	0	0

ALEX BROWN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	58	5½	

BRYAN ROBINSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	29	1	

BRIAN URLACHER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	115	2½	0

TOMMIE HARRIS (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	37	5	

ADEWALE OGUNLEYE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	64	15	

LANCE BRIGGS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	75	0	1

CHARLES TILLMAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	81	4	

MIKE GREEN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	43	½	1

MIKE BROWN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	75	0	2

BRAD MAYNARD

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	79	41.2

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year)

PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 DETROIT
19 at Green Bay
26 at Minnesota

OCTOBER

3 PHILADELPHIA
10 Open date
17 WASHINGTON
24 at Tampa Bay
31 SAN FRANCISCO

NOVEMBER

7 at N.Y. Giants
14 at Tennessee
21 INDIANAPOLIS
25 at Dallas (T)

DECEMBER

5 MINNESOTA
12 at Jacksonville
19 HOUSTON
26 at Detroit

JANUARY

2 GREEN BAY

(T) THURSDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-21** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.496** Games against playoff teams: **4**

1 CAROLINA PANTHERS

A team that thrives on its great chemistry gets a big boost when its catalyst—and best linebacker—returns after beating Hodgkin's

MARK FIELDS followed a tough workout schedule this spring. The Panthers linebacker reached the team facility by 5:30 every morning, lifted weights for a couple of hours and vanished long before his teammates arrived because he couldn't risk being seen by them. Fields settled on this regimen early on, after attending one scheduled team workout that turned into a two-hour *Oprah* episode. Every teammate he saw wanted to slap him on the back, ask him how he was feeling and wish him luck. Fields decided that he didn't have time to bask in all that love.

Fields is back as Carolina's starting strongside linebacker after missing all of last season while undergoing treatment for Hodgkin's disease, and he's competing like a man who not long ago thought he might never play football

again. Fields, a nine-year veteran, hustles through every drill as if he were an undrafted free agent hoping to make the team. "I'm giving this game everything I've got," he says. "I'm going to be attacking every time I'm out there." If there was an underrated aspect of the Panthers' run to last season's Super Bowl, it was the inspiration that came out of the illnesses that felled Fields and linebackers coach Sam Mills, who learned he had intestinal cancer. Mills continues to fight his disease, but Fields's is in

remission, and his healthy return means the Panthers now have their best linebacker back. The 6' 2", 244-pound Fields led Carolina with 103 tackles in 2002 while adding 7½ sacks. His speed will give the Panthers another dimension in their blitz package, while his vibrant personality will also be a welcome addition. "Mark is going to be our X factor," says Panthers strong safety Mike Minter. "He's motivated to show he's all the way back. And when we get down, he's going to be pumping us up because he wasn't around for the ride we had last year."

So far Fields has shown no indication that his health will be a problem. He has

C IS FOR COMEBACK Panthers coaches are still being cautious with Fields (58), but he has looked very strong in camp.

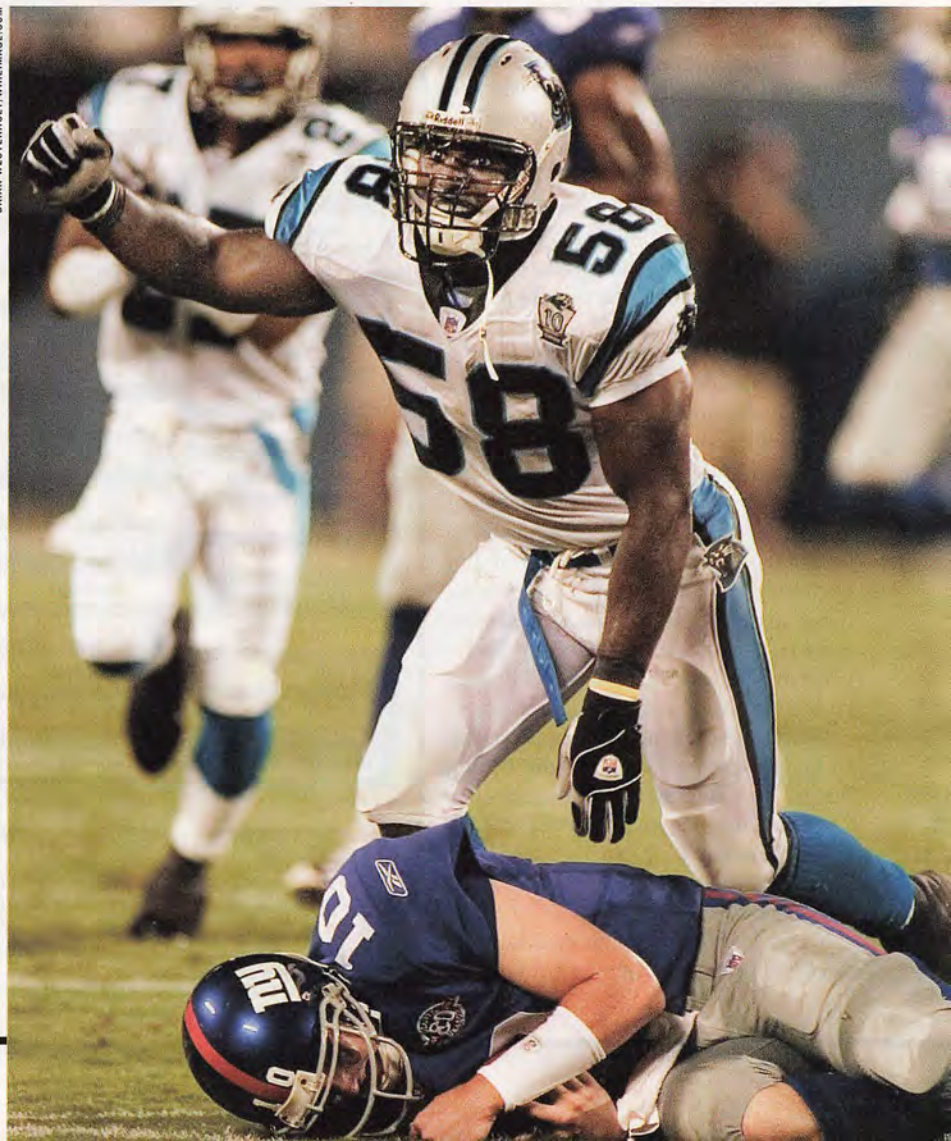
PLAYER ON THE RISE

> The Panthers were so impressed with **JORDAN GROSS** in 2003 that they released starting left tackle Todd Steussie to clear cap room. After starting all 16 games at right tackle, the 6' 4", 300-pound Gross switches to the left side this season. He has power, quickness and a nasty streak that'll serve him well as he protects Jake Delhomme's blind side.

again. Fields, a nine-year veteran, hustles through every drill as if he were an undrafted free agent hoping to make the team. "I'm giving this game everything I've got," he says. "I'm going to be attacking every time I'm out there."

If there was an underrated aspect of the Panthers' run to last season's Super Bowl, it was the inspiration that came out of the illnesses that felled Fields and linebackers coach Sam Mills, who learned he had intestinal cancer. Mills continues to fight his disease, but Fields's is in

BRIAN WESTERHOLT/WIREIMAGE.COM



been surprised at how well he's running, but Panthers coach John Fox occasionally sat him for one session a day during the early portion of camp. "Mark has healed, but he's not 100 percent yet," Fox says. "He was inactive for a long time, and we don't want him pulling a hamstring or a calf muscle. I've had to explain to him that we've got a destination in mind for him. We're going to make some stops along the way, but we're going to get there."

Fields vividly recalls lying in a hospital bed in Charlotte in August 2003, gazing up at Fox, Panthers general manager Marty Hurney and owner Jerry Richardson and listening as a team of doctors told him he had cancer. That's when he had to face the possibility of never putting on pads again.

As his treatment progressed, however, Fields started thinking about a return. Friends encouraged him to play again, as did ESPN analyst and former NFL running back Merrill Hoge, who also battled Hodgkin's. Fields's mother wasn't thrilled by the idea of his playing again, but she knew her son missed the game and that she couldn't hold him back. He often wrote letters to his teammates before key games, reminding them that they should cherish their opportunities. Now that he's back, Fields hasn't stopped preaching that message.

Fields says that one of the best things about his recovery is being around his teammates again. The strong chemistry of the Panthers helped them vault from doormats to Super Bowl team, and their greatest asset—a defensive front seven led by a dominant line—is now back to full strength, and they don't see any reason why they can't have another remarkable season. "All these guys are excited that I'm playing again," Fields says. "When people hear *cancer*, they automatically think a guy has one foot in the grave. They're wondering, When's the funeral? But I've proven that's not the case at all."

Fields recently took fellow linebackers Will Witherspoon and Dan Morgan to a Charlotte hospital to be with Mills as he underwent his chemotherapy. They watched Mills receive eight hours of radiation treatments. "You could see it opened their eyes," Fields says. "They saw that this was what I went through all last year, and it made them appreciate where we all are now."

—J.C.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

This offense is underrated. It might not be a great offense for a fantasy league, but it's great for winning games. . . . What I like most about **Jake Delhomme** is that he makes plays late in the game. You can't teach that, and you don't know who's good at it until they do it. . . . The strengths of the line are center **Jeff Mitchell** and left tackle **Jordan Gross**. Mitchell is an intelligent, technically sound player. . . . The passing game isn't very complicated, and rookie receiver **Keary Colbert** fits what they want—he's tough, he'll block, and he'll make catches on third down. . . . They're a little deeper at linebacker with **Mark Fields** back, and they've brought in [free agents] **Jessie Armstead** and **Brandon Short**. **Dan Morgan** is very fast and instinctive, but he's had a hard time staying healthy. . . . They've got three new guys in the secondary: **Ricky Manning** is small, but he can cover better than last year's starters; **Chris Gamble** has a lot of natural ability; and **Artrell Hawkins** is a serviceable corner. **Mike Minter** gives them a lot of leadership back there. They want smart defensive backs who won't gamble, because they're going to beat you with their front four.

MINTER



“It might not be a great offense for a fantasy league, but it's great for winning games.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics



2003 RECORD: 11-5

NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 7/18/16
DEFENSE 11/9/8

COACH: John Fox;
third season with
Carolina (18-14 in NFL)

OFFENSE

MUHSIN MUHAMMAD					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	INT.
WR	88	54	837	3	

KRIS MANGUM					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	INT.
TE	291	17	199	0	

STEPHEN DAVIS					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
RB	22	318	1,444	4.5	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
14	159	11.4	8		

JAKE DELHOMME					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%	
QB	59	449	266	59.2	
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING		
3,219	19	16	80.6		

BRAD HOOVER					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs
FB	278	6	21	3.5	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
12	72	6.0	1		

JOHN KASAY					
POS.	PVR	XP: MADE	XP: ATT.		
K	157	29	30		
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.			
32	38	125			

JORDAN GROSS					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LT	6'4"	300	16	16	

TUTAN REYES					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LG	6'3"	305	0	0	

JEFF MITCHELL					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
C	6'4"	300	15	15	

RICH TYLSKI*					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RG	6'4"	305	12	10	

MATT WILLIG					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RT	6'8"	315	13	0	

STEVE SMITH					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	55	88	1,110	8	

DEFENSE

WILL WITHERSPOON					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	97	1	1		

MIKE RUCKER					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
RE	59	12			

KRIS JENKINS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
RT	46	5			

DAN MORGAN					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
MLB	66	0	0		

BRENTSON BUCKNER					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
LT	23	½			

JULIUS PEPPERS					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS			
LE	46	7			

MARK FIELDS†					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
OLB	103	7½	1		

CHRIS GAMBLE (R)					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
CB	41	3			

MIKE MINTER					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
SS	89	0	3		

COLIN BRANCH					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
FS	2	0	0		

RICKY MANNING					
POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.		
CB	54	3			

TODD SAUERBRUN					
POS.	PUNTS	AVG.			
P	77	44.6			

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (stats for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (page 172) *2001 stats †2002 stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
13 GREEN BAY (M) 19 at Kansas City 26 Open date	3 ATLANTA 10 at Denver 17 at Philadelphia 24 SAN DIEGO 31 at Seattle	7 OAKLAND 14 at San Francisco 21 ARIZONA 28 TAMPA BAY	5 at New Orleans 12 ST. LOUIS 18 at Atlanta (S) 26 at Tampa Bay	2 NEW ORLEANS (M) MONDAY (S) SATURDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: **T-1** Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: **.537** Games against playoff teams: **8**

2 ATLANTA FALCONS

After a frustrating first season with the team, Peerless Price welcomes the return to health of Michael Vick and a new pass-happy offense

SHORTLY AFTER boarding a chartered flight from Atlanta to San Francisco early last January, Jim Mora urgently punched a number into his cellphone. He had just wrapped up a press conference in which he was introduced as the Falcons' new coach, and now Mora wanted to make a statement directly to his top receiver, Peerless Price. His message: *Get ready!* Mora was bringing the West Coast offense to Atlanta, and he intended to turn Price into the next beneficiary of that pass-happy system. Price couldn't have been happier if Mora had told him he'd won the lottery.

A year ago Price arrived in Atlanta as a highly touted, high-priced free agent eager to hook up with rising-star quarterback Michael Vick. But Vick suffered a broken right leg in the preseason and missed the first 11 games, and Price wound up with mediocre numbers (64

catches, 838 yards, three touchdowns). Now the combination of Vick's return to health and the implementation of the West Coast should restore Price to prominence. The switch in systems also means he will be moving from split end, the position he played in former coach Dan Reeves' archaic offense, to flanker.

"You look at all the flankers who've played in this offense—guys like Terrell Owens and Jerry Rice—and they've thrived," Price says. "Now I have the

same opportunity." Price told receivers coach George Stewart that his goal this season was to gain 1,200 yards; Stewart advised him to think bigger.

Price had never played split end before last season, and he was frustrated by how often he went up against double coverage. As a flanker he'll frequently be put in motion and will also line up in the slot. All that movement, Price believes, is one

reason defenses won't be able to harness him as they did in 2003, when Atlanta averaged 164.4 passing yards a game (31st in the league). Price had only one 100-yard game, and seven times he caught three passes or less in a game.

HIGH-PRICED Atlanta paid a bundle for the Peerless free agent, but a depleted and outdated attack limited him to 64 catches.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> Atlanta desperately needs a playmaker in the secondary, and rookie **DEANGELO HALL**, the eighth pick in the draft, has the potential to be its shutdown corner. He has outstanding speed and leaping ability, and doesn't shy from contact. He also could help them on special teams—he averaged 15.0 yards per punt return during his career at Virginia Tech.





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Vick's replacements, Doug Johnson and Kurt Kittner, combined for a woeful 10 touchdowns, a 50.4 completion percentage and 56.3 passer rating as the Falcons went 2-9 before Vick's return. (They finished 5-11.) "I wouldn't have been so upset if we had been winning," Price says, "but we were losing." Price became even more frustrated after an acquaintance advised him to look back at how receivers had performed in Reeves's offense over the years; when Price did that, he discovered that Atlanta hadn't had a 1,000-yard receiver since 1998. "It got to a point where I was wondering why they even signed me," he says.

Price often talked to family members about his struggles. They told him to stay optimistic, that the situation could only get better. His friends around the league, including defensive backs Deon Grant of Jacksonville and Champ Bailey, then with the Redskins, told him to keep his head up. "When you lose your starting quarterback, you're going to have problems, and it took Peerless half the season to understand that," Stewart says. "High-priced players want to prove that they're worth the money, but I told him it wasn't about the money. It's about being a professional."

Price has impressed the new coaching staff with his attitude and didn't let a shoulder injury keep him from practicing. "Some receivers don't want to get out there when they're nicked up," says Mora, "but I actually had to tell him to sit out one day." Price wants to make up for lost time with Vick, work on their timing and get comfortable in the new offense. Considering all the team's weapons, including Pro Bowl tight end Alge Crumpler and the backfield combination of Warrick Dunn and T.J. Duckett, the offense could be an explosive unit.

If the offense can click and the defense improves—which shouldn't be hard, since it was the league's worst last season—the Falcons have a chance to surprise people. Mora, the son of a former NFL coach, has energized the Falcons with his enthusiasm. He wants them to set high goals for themselves—something Price has already done. Most of all, Price wants to prove that 2003 was an aberration. "Those days are behind me," he says. "I don't care what happens to me now, because it can never be worse than what happened last year." —J.C.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

Defensively, their best player is **Keith Brooking**. He can really run, and he's a competitor. The guys around him are decent, at best. . . . There isn't much up front. **Ed Jasper** is a solid run stuffer, but nothing special. Of their two ends, **Patrick Kerney** has more speed and pass-rush ability than **Brady Smith**, but neither was big enough to be effective in a 3-4. . . . Their secondary is a mystery. I know **Jim Mora** is a big fan of **Jason Webster**, because they were together in San Francisco. He's a solid cover corner even though he's 5' 9". . . . Having **Michael Vick** back will make a huge difference. His presence creates more confidence in all aspects of that team. The West Coast offense will be good for him, and I don't think it will hold him back. . . . **Alge Crumpler** is one of the best pass-catching tight ends in the business. He's big and he runs well, and he's also improved his blocking. . . . Of their two running backs, **Warrick Dunn** worries opponents the most. **T.J. Duckett** is just a big guy who's going to pound for yards. Dunn's an exceptional receiver out of the backfield, and he's a threat to go all the way if he gets a little space.

CRUMPLER



The West Coast offense will be good for Michael Vick, and I don't think it will hold him back.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 14/31/29

DEFENSE 29/32/32

COACH: Jim Mora; first season as an NFL head coach

WARRICK DUNN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	57	125	672	5.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
37	336	9.1	5	

MICHAEL VICK

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	24	100	50	50.0
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
585	4	3	69.0	

JUSTIN GRIFFITH

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	320	38	168	4.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
21	122	5.8	2	

JAY FEELY

POS.	PVR	XP%	MADE	XP%	ATT.
K	166	32	33		
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PCT.			
19	27	89			

OFFENSE

PEERLESS PRICE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	75	64	838	3

ALGE CRUMPLER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	85	44	552	3

KEVIN SHAFFER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	290	16	8

MICHAEL MOORE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 2"	318	2	0

TODD MCCLURE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
C	6' 1"	286	16	16

KYNAN FORNEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	307	16	16

TODD WEINER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 4"	297	16	16

DEZ WHITE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	130	49	583	3

DEFENSE

KEITH BROOKING

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	144	0	0

BRADY SMITH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	25	4	

ED JASPER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	41	3	

CHRIS DRAFT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	122	2	1

ROD COLEMAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	52	5½	

PATRICK KERNEY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	46	6½	

MATT STEWART

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	76	2½	0



JASON WEBSTER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	10	1	

BRYAN SCOTT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	56	0	2

CORY HALL

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	31	0	0

DEANGELO HALL (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	93	1	

CHRIS MOHR

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	87	39.9

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year)

PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	12 at San Francisco 19 ST. LOUIS 26 ARIZONA	3 at Carolina 10 DETROIT 17 SAN DIEGO 24 at Kansas City 31 at Denver	7 Open date 14 TAMPA BAY 21 at N.Y. Giants 28 NEW ORLEANS	5 at Tampa Bay 12 OAKLAND 18 CAROLINA (S) 26 at New Orleans	2 at Seattle

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-23 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .488 Games against playoff teams: 6

(S) SATURDAY

3

NEW ORLEANS
SAINTS

After three seasons of underachieving, the players say they've buckled down and eliminated the distractions that kept them out of the playoffs

THE PREVAILING silence in the Saints' locker room at their Metairie, La., training camp was unsettling because it was so different from the cacophony of New Orleans locker rooms in the past, in which screaming voices and booming bass lines and wideout Joe Horn's every thought—volubly expressed—merged into a wicked din. Gone is the row of card and domino tables that made the room seem a low-rent casino, where one high-stakes game last year ended in a postpractice brawl between center LeCharles Bentley and tackle Victor Riley. And gone, too, coach Jim Haslett hopes, are most of the distractions he believes contributed to the team's missing the playoffs for the third straight season.

If Haslett's decision to take strict control of his locker room seems a tad harsh, good luck finding a Saints player who

agrees with that assessment. Despite a roster with highlight-reel potential on both sides of the ball, the Saints have wandered in a .500 wasteland since the heady days of 2000, when new quarterback Aaron Brooks emerged to lead the team to a playoff victory over the Rams. Since then, however, Haslett has faced criticism from the media and the fans that his talented players lack discipline and fundamentals; last year, in a hailstorm of lost fumbles and missed tackles, New Orleans limped

to a 1-4 start and was finished. So Haslett clamped down on the players and replaced two assistants (receivers coach Hubbard Alexander and defensive line coach Sam Clancy were fired), and essentially dared anyone to cross him.

"It gets a little tiring hearing about how loaded we are every year," Haslett says. "Last year we just weren't good enough on defense. We just couldn't tackle. So we

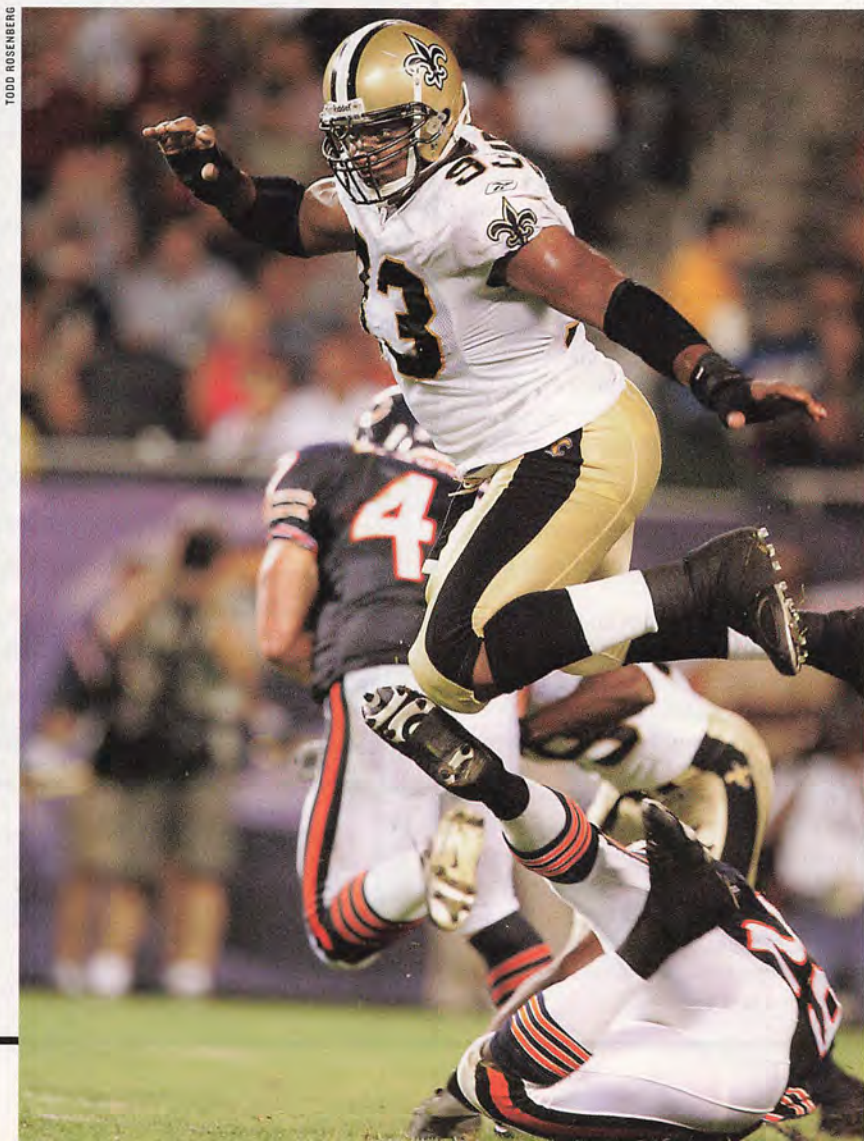
decided in the off-season to go back to the fundamentals. There'll be a different focus, a different effort out there this year. There had better be."

Nowhere is there more urgency than on the defensive line, a big-ticket unit that

STEPPING UP Howard admits that the Saints' defense was sloppy last season, and welcomes a crackdown by coaches.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

► Blessed with soft hands and 4.2 speed, **DONTE STALLWORTH** averaged 19.4 yards a reception last season. Trouble was, he had only 25 catches, missing parts of seven games with hamstring injuries. He worked with a flexibility coach in the off-season and stretched for 20 minutes after each practice this summer. He looked dominant in camp, not at all hamstrung.





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includes three first-round picks, a group that was gashed for 140.1 yards a game and 4.7 yards a carry last year. Right end Darren Howard, the team's most complete defender, says the coaches didn't spare any feelings when they addressed the line's many shortcomings in the team's minicamps. "They let us know how bad we were, and they were right," Howard says. "Our technique got sloppy. We stopped doing the elementary things. So we've worked on lining up tighter, closing down gaps and tackling the way we know how."

Among the new drills instituted at training camp was a tackling exercise in which each defensive player hit an unmanned solo blocking sled, drove it back and then wrenched the apparatus over on its side. It's an ideal drill for defensive tackle Brian Young, a free-agent signee whose hyperaggressive style should mesh with the solid play of Howard and left end Charles Grant. But the key to the unit is the development of the sixth pick in last year's draft, defensive tackle Johnathan Sullivan, who was terrible in '03 then reported to camp out of shape and was dropped from the starting lineup by an irate Haslett. Sullivan is needed to occupy blockers, which helps the Saints' anemic pass rush (32 sacks, of which Grant had 10). To that end New Orleans also used its first pick this year on end Will Smith from Ohio State, a speedy rush specialist who'll be used on passing downs.

The line will need more help than it's been getting from an average linebacking corps and a creaky secondary that relies on underrated cornerback Fred Thomas and hopes for one more good season from 13-year veteran corner Ashley Ambrose.

Offensively, Brooks is coming off a year that was a microcosm of the Saints' up-and-down fortunes. Despite throwing for 3,546 yards, 24 touchdowns and a league-low eight interceptions (for 16 games), he also lost a league-high 11 fumbles, several of which he simply dropped. Theories abounded—hands too wet, hands too dry, poor ball holding technique—but Brooks and Haslett chalk it up to bad luck. "Aaron is the guy here," Haslett says. "When he's going well, he's one of the best quarterbacks in football. I see him taking us where we need to go this year."

—J.E.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

Aaron Brooks is inconsistent—he makes a great athletic throw and then makes a bone-headed play—but they've got some serious offensive weapons. **Deuce McAllister** has speed and can make plays on his own. . . . **Donte' Stallworth** has unbelievable ability, though whether he'll put it all together is a question. He can run, he can change directions—he could be a star, but he's got to be more dependable. **Joe Horn** has some left in the tank. . . . On the offensive line **LeCharles Bentley** will be an upgrade over **Jerry Fontenot** at center, but **Kendyl Jacox** is nothing special, and **Victor Riley** will always have a weight issue. . . . Their defense is an enigma. They have a lot of potential, but who knows how they'll play? I don't know that they have a cover corner. **Ashley Ambrose** was a hell of a player, but at 33 how much does he have left? **Fred Thomas** isn't fast enough. . . . At linebacker **Orlando Ruff** and **Derrick Rodgers** are nothing special. . . . I assume they drafted **Will Smith** to replace **Darren Howard**, whom they apparently don't want to pay next year. Howard and **Charles Grant** are good, but **Brian Young** is small.

McALLISTER



“Cover corner Ashley Ambrose was a hell of a player, but at 33 how much does he have left?”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 8-8

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 11/8/11

DEFENSE 27/8/18

COACH: Jim Haslett;
fifth season with New
Orleans (34-30 in NFL)

DEUCE McALLISTER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	10	351	1,641	4.7
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
69	516	7.5	8	

AARON BROOKS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	54	518	306	59.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,546	24	8	88.8	

MIKE KARNEY (R)

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	357	4	-2	-0.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
14	106	7.6	0	

JOHN CARNEY

POS.	PVR	XPts MADE	XPts ATT.
K	172	36	37
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
22	30	102	

OFFENSE

JOE HORN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	51	78	973	10

BOO WILLIAMS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	110	41	436	5

WAYNE GANDY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QNS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	308	16	16

KENDYL JACOX

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QNS.	STARTS
LG	6' 2"	330	12	11

LeCHARLES BENTLEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QNS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	299	13	13

MONTRAE HOLLAND

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QNS.	STARTS
RG	6' 2"	333	16	7

VICTOR RILEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QNS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	328	16	16

DONTE' STALLWORTH

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	129	25	485	3

DEFENSE

JAMES ALLEN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	11	0	0

DARREN HOWARD

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	29	5	

JOHNATHAN SULLIVAN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	34	1	

COURTNEY WATSON (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	117	3½	2

BRIAN YOUNG

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	36	2	

CHARLES GRANT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	61	10	

DERRICK RODGERS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	74	0	1



FRED THOMAS

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	86	4	

JAY BELLAMY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	94	1	3

TEBUCKY JONES

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	69	0	1

ASHLEY AMBROSE

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	47	3	

MITCH BERGER

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.	
P	71	44.3	

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 SEATTLE
19 SAN FRANCISCO
26 at St. Louis

OCTOBER

3 at Arizona
10 TAMPA BAY
17 MINNESOTA
24 at Oakland
31 Open date

NOVEMBER

7 at San Diego
14 KANSAS CITY
21 DENVER
28 at Atlanta

DECEMBER

5 CAROLINA
12 at Dallas
19 at Tampa Bay
26 ATLANTA

JANUARY

2 at Carolina

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 20 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .504 Games against playoff teams: 8

4 TAMPA BAY BUCS

Coach Jon Gruden got rid of some old headaches but may have created a few more by putting together an offense that won't get better with age

IN AN EFFORT to colonize the eastern half of central Florida, the Buccaneers hold training camp in Orlando, at Disney's Wide World of Sports, a sprawling complex of playing fields and gymnasiums that is the site of innumerable youth tournaments. That would explain the presence of busloads of kids behind the restraining ropes, shrieking youngsters who make it sound as if practices were being held on an elementary school playground at recess. However maddening the distraction, coach Jon Gruden could be forgiven for scanning the youthful throngs decked out in Tampa Bay uni—many with pads—and thinking, Let's see what those youngsters can do.

A new day has dawned in Tampa, where the Bucs' roster bears little resemblance to the one that won the Super Bowl two years ago. After last season's 7-9 bust, the team's brain trust—which is to say,

Gruden—flipped the roster like a short-order cook, signing 21 free agents to take the place of Buccaneers who were already gone or on their way out. Off to Oakland went catalytic defensive tackle Warren Sapp, and to Denver stalwart strong safety John Lynch. Wideout Keyshawn Johnson, who was deactivated in midseason, is in Dallas. Indeed, the faces most remembered from the franchise's greatest moment have dwindled to one: the sneering, freckled visage of Gruden, who consolidated

his power last January when he hand-picked general manager Bruce Allen (his old pal from Oakland) to replace Rich McKay. For better or worse this is Gruden's team. "Look, Warren and John will be missed," Gruden says. "I miss 'em, my kids miss 'em. But we're not thinking about it too much. We've moved on."

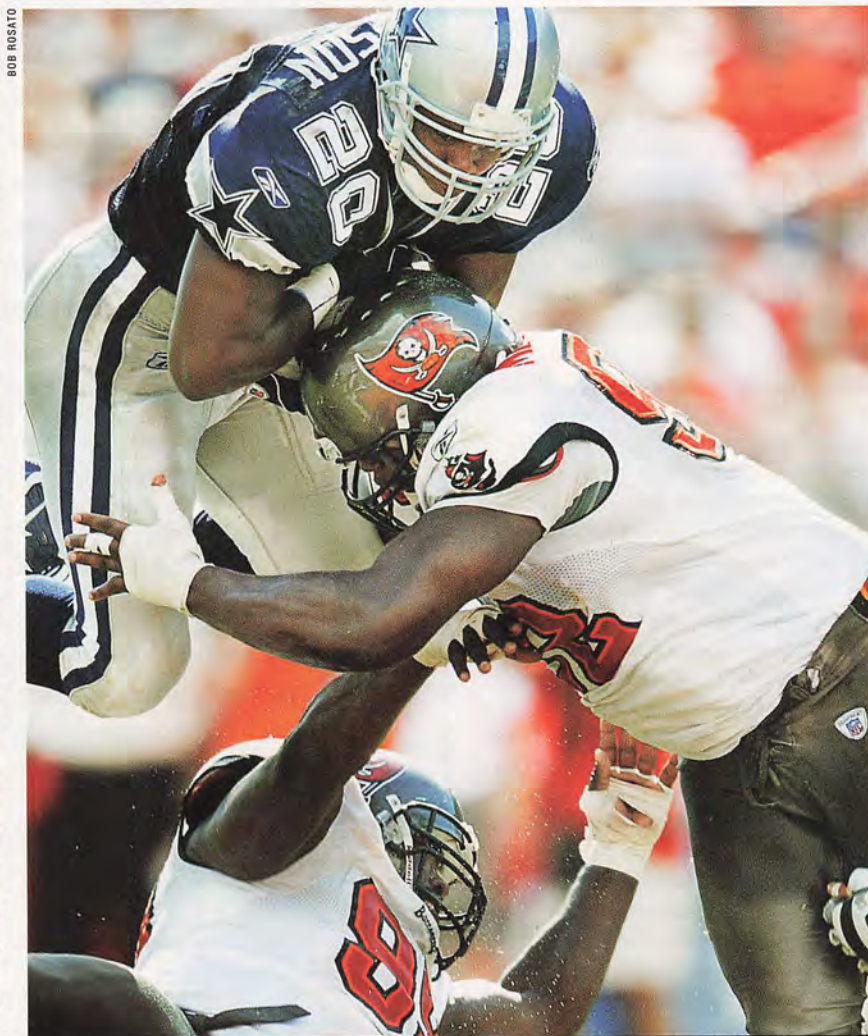
Says defensive end Simeon Rice, "Even if we have a big drop-off in personality, our

productivity will be fine. We'll be younger on D, but that's O.K.; there are lots of lessons being taught in that huddle. The onus is on guys like Derrick Brooks and myself to do the teaching—and on the young guys to continue this legacy."

MEET MR. BOOGER McFarland won't be the provocateur Sapp was, but he'll be a worthy replacement for him at tackle.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> After a rookie season that was noteworthy only because he never took a snap, former University of Texas quarterback **CHRIS SIMMS** was a revelation in camp this year. The rangy southpaw showed improved accuracy and command of coach Jon Gruden's short-pass scheme, and he may have snatched the No. 2 job from Brian Griese.



ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

He's talking about young guys such as third-year safety Jermaine Phillips, who started eight games a year ago. While Lynch's leadership and fierce on-field demeanor will be missed, Phillips is the superior athlete: faster and stronger, and a hard hitter in his own right. Phillips enjoyed a close relationship with Lynch, whose magnanimity included inviting Phillips to his house at midseason for a fitting, then surprising him with a free suit. "That's the way it is around here," Phillips says. "We thrive because the guys care about each other. I'll miss John—he's irreplaceable—but all I can do is be ready."

Taking over for Sapp will be Anthony (Booger) McFarland, whose impressive play was often overshadowed by Sapp's expansive persona. "People thought Warren was a big, outspoken a--, but he was great to me," McFarland says. Rice and left end Greg Spires will provide the upfield push, but someone—likely fourth-year nosetackle Chartric Darby—will have to overachieve to improve the pass rush. "It's not like we're just taking guesses with these guys," a defiant Gruden says. "Jermaine Phillips is a great player. McFarland was a first-round pick. We know how good they can be."

A far bigger concern is the creaky offense, on which at least eight of the 11 projected starters will be 30 or older. In fact, the unit looks suspiciously like those of Gruden's former Oakland squads: aged, injury-prone and—as with new halfback Charlie Garner and late signee Tim Brown—former Raiders. Most problematic is the patchwork line featuring four new faces (only one younger than 29) who must keep 35-year-old quarterback Brad Johnson upright. The wide receiver position is unsettled; last year's No. 1 pass catcher, 34-year-old Keenan McCardell, was a holdout as of Monday (a factor in the signing of the 38-year-old Brown), and 32-year-old newcomer Joey Galloway and first-round pick Michael Clayton had to learn a new offense. The Bucs will depend heavily on Garner, 32, who when healthy is still among the NFL's more dangerous running-receiving threats.

All of which means that even if the defense is better than it has been in recent years, it may not make much difference to Tampa Bay's playoff hopes. The youth that abounded on the other side of the ropes in Orlando was a reminder of what Gruden's team needs most. —J.E.

I guess they want to be the oldest team in the league. The problem is, old players can quickly fall off the face of the earth. The offensive line is too old to count on; any injuries, and they'll get killed. **Charlie Garner** could be good—but he could also be finished. Same with **Mike Alstott**. . . . **Brad Johnson** gets savvier every year. He won't take sacks and won't hurt the team. . . . Wide receiver could be a big headache. **Joey Galloway** has been in decline; **Michael Clayton** was a good prospect, but he's not fast enough to be drafted where they took him [at No. 15]. . . . Depth is a concern, especially at quarterback. **Brian Griese** has shown he can't play, and **Chris Simms** isn't that tough or quick. . . . On defense they'll miss Warren Sapp more than they'll miss John Lynch. Sapp is still a disruptive force, but Lynch was declining. . . . **Simeon Rice** was a dog in Arizona, but he's been a surprise in Tampa, and **Derrick Brooks** is great. . . . New Orleans and Carolina should be better than the Bucs, and if Michael Vick stays healthy, Atlanta's probably better too. . . . The Bucs will miss the playoffs, and I don't see much reason for hope on the horizon.

JOHNSON



Charlie Garner could be good—but he could also be finished. Same with Mike Alstott.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 7-9

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 24/6/10

DEFENSE 13/3/5

COACH: Jon Gruden:
third season with Tampa
Bay (57-39 in NFL)

CHARLIE GARNER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	92	120	553	4.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
48	386	8.0	4	

BRAD JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	81	570	354	62.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,811	26	21	81.5	

MIKE ALSTOTT

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	135	27	77	2.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
10	83	8.3	2	

MARTIN GRAMATICA

POS.	PVR	XP	MADE	XP	ATT.
K	215	33	34		
FG	MADE	FG	ATT.	PTS.	
16	26		81		

OFFENSE

TIM BROWN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	124	52	567	2

KEN DILGER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	267	22	244	1

DERRICK DEESE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 3"	289	11	11

COSEY COLEMAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	322	16	16

JOHN WADE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	299	16	16

MATT STINCHCOMB

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 6"	310	6	4

TODD STEUSSIE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	308	16	16

JOEY GALLOWAY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	170	34	672	2

DEFENSE

IAN GOLD

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	27	0	2

SIMEON RICE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	50	15	

CHARTRIC DARBY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	13	2	

SHELTON QUARLES

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	80	0	0

ANTHONY MCFARLAND

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	50	2½	

GREG SPIRES

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	36	3½	

DERRICK BROOKS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	103	1	2



BRIAN KELLY

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	15	1	

JERMAINE PHILLIPS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	39	0	1

DWIGHT SMITH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	67	0	5

RONDE BARBER

POS.	TACKLES	INT.	
CB	99	2	

JOSH BIDWELL

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	69	41.7

NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at Washington
19 SEATTLE
26 at Oakland

OCTOBER

3 DENVER
10 at New Orleans
18 at St. Louis (M)
24 CHICAGO
31 Open date

NOVEMBER

7 KANSAS CITY
14 at Atlanta
21 SAN FRANCISCO
28 at Carolina

DECEMBER

5 ATLANTA
12 at San Diego
19 NEW ORLEANS
26 CAROLINA

JANUARY

2 at Arizona

(M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-26 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .484 Games against playoff teams: 8

1 SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

The pieces are in place for a title run, but there's a catch: A talented trio of wide receivers can't let the opportunity slip through their fingers

THE SETTING was appropriate, if only in a metaphorical sense. After completing one of their final practices of training camp at Eastern Washington University, four members of the Seahawks' receiving corps asked to stage a group interview in a locker-room sauna. "It's hot in here," No. 3 wideout Bobby Engram explained, "but that's the way we like it."

With Seattle having emerged as a trendy Super Bowl pick and quarterback Matt Hasselbeck flirting with stardom, there's plenty of heat on the receivers to demonstrate whether they belong among the elite as well. "Our team has some big goals," says fourth-year veteran Koren Robinson, "and we know a lot of it is on us. When this team needs a big play, the ball's going to come to one of us, and we've got to be ready."

If the team's fortunes indeed rest in the receivers' hands, that is sure to send shivers

down the spines of at least some Seahawks fans. For, as much success as Darrell Jackson (68 receptions for 1,137 yards), Robinson (65 for 896) and Engram (52 for 637) enjoyed in becoming one of the league's most productive units in 2003, it was the passes these players didn't catch that drew the most attention.

Overall, Seahawks receivers dropped 41 balls—the second-highest figure in the league—during the regular season, with Jackson, Robinson and Engram combining for 25. (By the count of

beat writers who covered the team, five of the trio's drops would have been touchdowns.) So rather than being known around the NFL as the only threesome to have amassed more than 600 receiving yards apiece, they were viewed as the monsters of the muff.

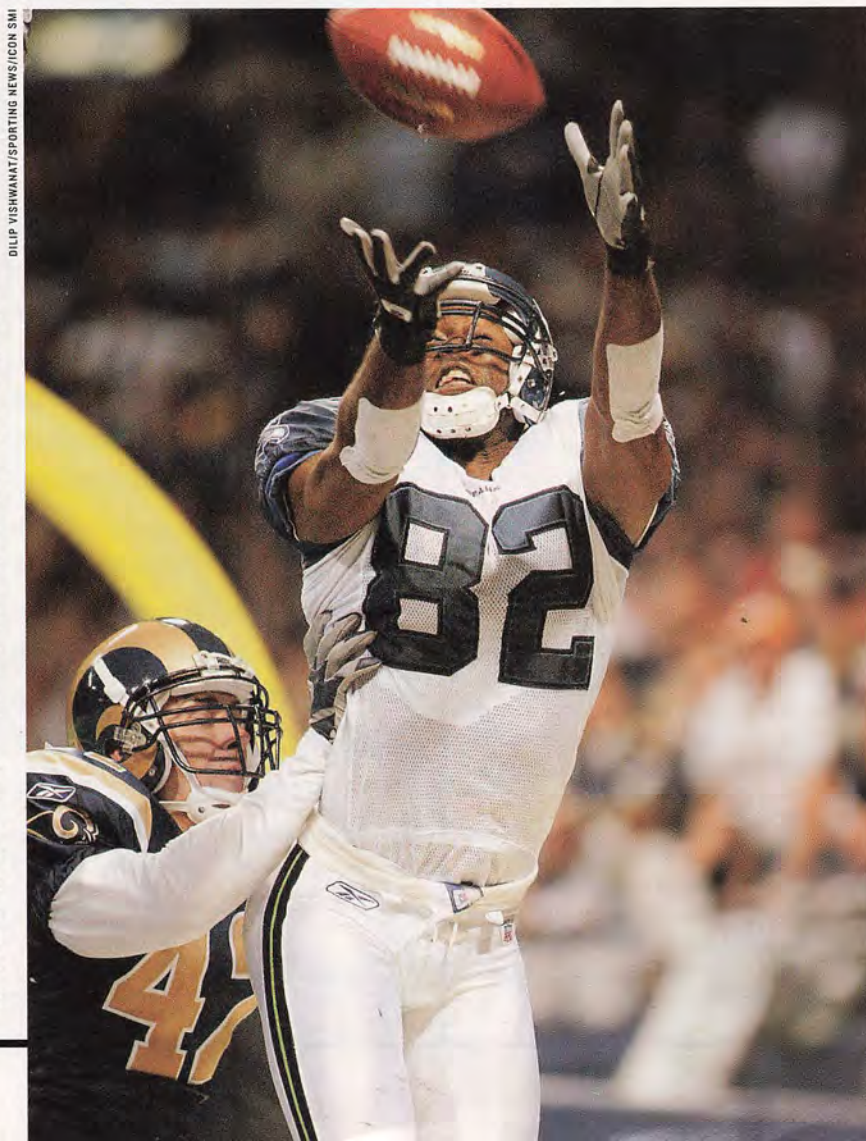
The low point came last Jan. 4, when shortly before an NFC wild-card playoff (Seattle's second postseason game since

1988), Rams All-Pro wideout Torry Holt was asked about the Seahawks trio while serving as a guest analyst on ESPN's *NFL Countdown*. Holt replied that Jackson, Robinson and Engram could not be considered elite receivers because they

HIT OR MISS Jackson had 68 catches last season, but the passes he and his mates dropped drew the most attention.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> A massive tight end (6' 7", 260 pounds) picked in the first round of the 2002 draft, **JERRAMY STEVENS** has suffered from a lack of focus and caught only six passes for 72 yards last year. But he was a regular in the weight room during the off-season and turned heads with his stellar performance in training camp, unseating Itula Mili as the starter.





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dropped too many balls, then spelled out their deficiencies. It was a startling display of public criticism from a division rival.

But the Seattle receivers didn't do anything to convince a national-TV audience otherwise, dropping five passes, including one for a potential touchdown by Robinson, in a 33-27 overtime loss to the Packers. The game ended when Hasselbeck threw a short pass in the left flat to fourth receiver Alex Bannister, who was slow to break off his hitch pattern in the wake of a Green Bay blitz. Packers cornerback Al Harris jumped the route and returned the interception 52 yards for a touchdown.

The memory of what happened in Green Bay has haunted Seahawks receivers in the eight months since, some more vividly than others. Engram's four-year-old son, Dean, repeatedly watched a DVD of the game in the off-season, often yelling out helpful reminders such as, "Daddy, you just dropped the ball." To stay focused on improving their performance—and their image—Engram and his receiving mates have paid special attention to cradling the ball on receptions, and anyone who drops one has had to do 10 push-ups on the spot. In off-season workouts, even when a drop was replayed while viewing game tape, transgressions were treated seriously and conspicuously.

Not that it's all gloom and doom: A smile is the fallback facial expression for Jackson, whose quick burst off the ball evokes images of Jaguars star Jimmy Smith; Robinson, a swift deep threat who is dangerous after the catch; and Engram, a crafty third-down specialist who excels on underneath patterns. The receivers even had their own touchdown dance last season, the Sprinkler, which was off limits to their quarterback. "It's a tough clique to penetrate," Hasselbeck says, "but I don't mind, because they play so much better when they're having fun."

The Seattle plan is to yuk it up all the way to Super Bowl XXXIX, and it's an opportunity the wideouts don't intend to mishandle. "I think we're going to be asked to step up, and that's the way it should be," Engram says. "People talk about the passes we didn't catch, but they can't say we don't get open or beat press coverage or make plays or score touchdowns. All everyone talks about is the drops—and that's something we're going to correct."

—M.S.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

They're really going to be formidable. [General manager] **Bob Ferguson** has a great eye for talent, and he has really improved this team. . . . **Matt Hasselbeck** has two things going for him: He processes information and he responds very well to what the coach wants done. . . . **Shaun Alexander** is a tough back with great vision and good power off tackle; he makes quick cuts with a burst. **Mack Strong**, the fullback, is aptly named. . . . The guy who makes that offense go is **Koren Robinson**. He makes the other receivers better and frees them up to do other things. . . . There are no Jonathan Ogdens on that offensive line, but it's a group that works well together—a glove where all the fingers fit. . . . The defense that [coordinator] **Ray Rhodes** likes to run is about instincts and hustle, and players love that. His defenders don't make mistakes, and they play at a fast tempo. . . . **Marcus Trufant** is already good and should make a huge jump this year. The other cornerback, **Ken Lucas**, needs to play at a higher level for them to be successful. **Ken Hamlin**, the young safety, is a freelancer, a reckless player.

TRUFANT



“Shaun Alexander is a tough back with great vision, and he makes cuts with a quick burst.”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK
(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 10/7/6

DEFENSE 14/27/19

COACH: Mike Holmgren;
sixth season with Seattle
(116-76 in NFL)

SHAUN ALEXANDER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	5	326	1,435	4.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
42	295	7.0	16	

MATT HASSELBECK

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	37	513	313	61.0
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,841	26	15	88.8	

MAC STRONG

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	258	37	174	4.7
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
29	216	7.4	1	

JOSH BROWN

POS.	PVR	XP's MADE	XP's ATT.
K	207	48	48
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
22	30	114	

OFFENSE

DARRELL JACKSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	68	68	1,137	9

JERRAMY STEVENS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	253	6	72	0

WALTER JONES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	308	16	16

STEVE HUTCHINSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	313	16	16

ROBBIE TOBECK

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	297	16	16

CHRIS GRAY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	308	16	16

CHRIS TERRY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	295	12	10

KOREN ROBINSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	137	65	896	4

DEFENSE

D.D. LEWIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	65	0	0

GRANT WISTROM

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RE	61	7½

RASHAD MOORE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RT	30	1

ORLANDO HUFF

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	20	1	0

CEDRIC WOODARD

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LT	57	0

CHIKE OKEAFOR

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LE	47	8

ANTHONY SIMMONS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	100	3	3

KEN LUCAS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	52	1	

DAMIEN ROBINSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	30	0	1

KEN HAMLIN

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	96	0	1

MARCUS TRUFANT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	78	2	



NEW ACQUISITION PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at New Orleans
19 at Tampa Bay
26 SAN FRANCISCO

OCTOBER

3 Open date
10 ST. LOUIS
17 at New England
24 at Arizona
31 CAROLINA

NOVEMBER

7 at San Francisco
14 at St. Louis
21 MIAMI
28 BUFFALO

DECEMBER

6 DALLAS (M)
12 at Minnesota
19 at N.Y. Jets
26 ARIZONA

JANUARY

2 ATLANTA

(M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 6 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .516 Games against playoff teams: 5

2 ST. LOUIS RAMS

He has a swagger that comes with the starting quarterback job and a huge new contract. But can Marc Bulger get the offense cranked up again?

HE WAS a reckless pirate in a sea of colorless navigators, the one NFL coach who could be counted on to put his conservative peers to shame. Then last January, in the NFC divisional playoffs, Mike Martz chose to play it safe, and that may have cost the Rams a chance to reach their third Super Bowl in five years.

Trailing the Panthers by three points with 42 seconds to go at the Edward Jones Dome, St. Louis was 15 yards from a potential winning touchdown. But Martz, fearful that a turnover would derail a furious comeback that had included a successful onside kick, instructed quarterback Marc Bulger to run down the clock, setting up Jeff Wilkins's tying 38-yard field goal as time expired.

The move was widely viewed as a sign that Martz lacked confidence in Bulger, who had thrown 22 interceptions as a first-

ing of his successor to a four-year, \$19.1 million contract, the Rams are Bulger's team. Martz's legacy now rests on the performance of a 27-year-old passer and his patchwork offensive line, which will be without tackle Kyle Turley for the season (back injury).

"What I did in that game was interpreted as my not having confidence in Marc, but we threw the ball eight out of

11 plays in overtime, so that obviously wasn't the case," Martz says. "Going into that game, if I'd been given that hypothetical situation, I definitely would've gone for the win. But the feel of the game and the way we'd struggled in the red zone

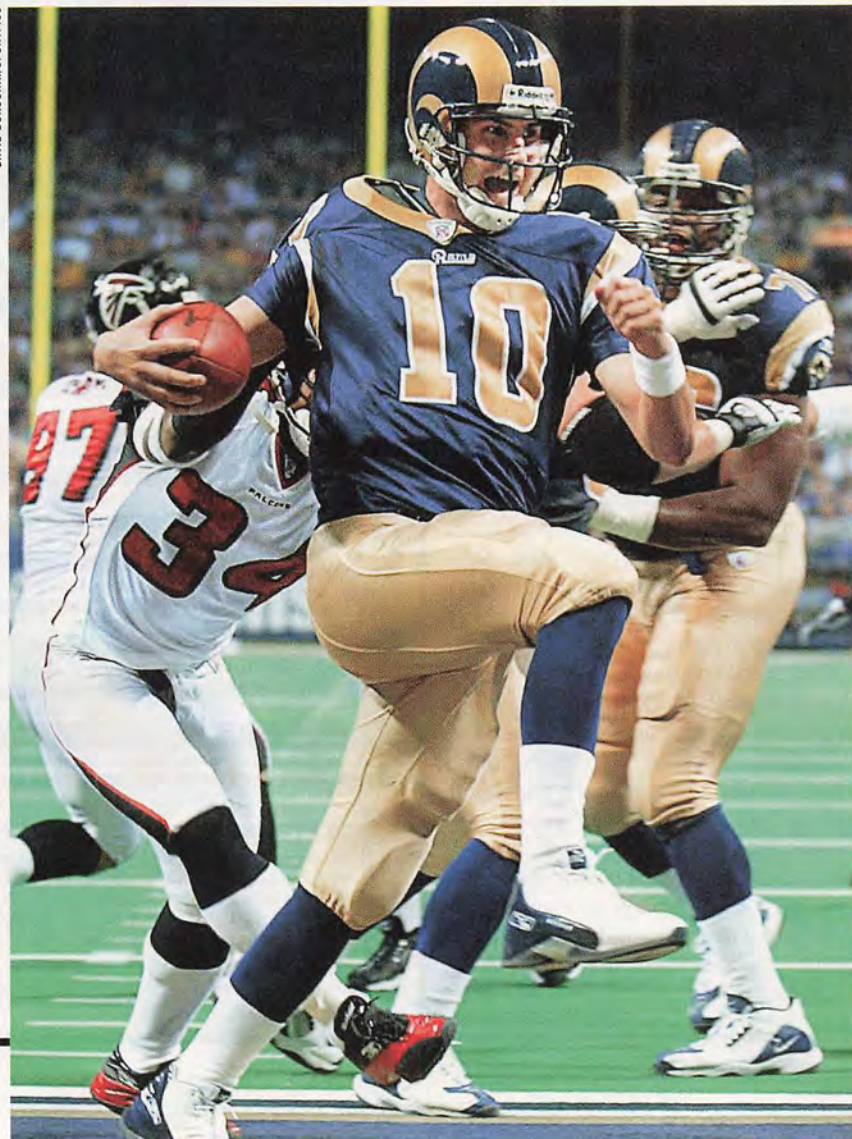
SHOW TIME With defenses geared up to pressure him in '03, Bulger threw 22 picks and seldom had room to roam.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> A rookie third-round pick from Georgia Tech who had to sit out last season because he was academically ineligible, defensive end **ANTHONY HARGROVE** has wowed the Rams, who think he can be an immediate threat off the edge. "He has size [6' 4", 269], speed, quickness and intelligence," says general manager Charley Arney, "and he's nasty."

year starter. As if to confirm that opinion, with 13:48 gone in overtime Panthers cornerback Ricky Manning picked off a Bulger pass at the Carolina 38-yard line. Three plays later Jake Delhomme connected with Steve Smith on a 69-yard touchdown pass for a 29-23 Panthers victory.

Despite the ensuing outcry from incensed fans and the St. Louis media, Martz and Bulger kept their jobs. With the off-season release of two-time league MVP Kurt Warner (now with the Giants) and the sign-



changed my thinking. Had we been playing better offensively, like we had the first three years I was here, it would've been a no-brainer."

That three-year run by the Greatest Show on Turf—Martz was the Rams' first-year offensive coordinator in 1999 and took over as coach when Dick Vermeil resigned following St. Louis's victory in Super Bowl XXXIV—featured offensive pyrotechnics, with Warner delivering the ball to future Hall of Fame halfback Marshall Faulk and breakaway receiving threats Isaac Bruce, Torry Holt and Az-Zahir Hakim. Bruce and Holt, a 2003 Pro Bowl selection, remain in St. Louis's lineup, with the 31-year-old Faulk trying to hold off first-round draft pick Steven Jackson from Oregon State.

The key to it all is Bulger, whose accuracy, toughness and ability to grasp Martz's scheme have convinced the coach that he's up to the task. A revelation in 2002, when he led the Rams to a 5-0 record after Warner broke the pinkie on his throwing hand, Bulger became the starter after Warner's shaky outing in the '03 opener. Bulger's numbers (he was sacked 37 times, fifth most in the league) reflected his inexperience. "Last year Marc struggled with protections," Martz says. "He knew what to do, but he didn't know why we were doing it—and a lot of that was because, as Kurt's backup, he hadn't had the preparation."

Bulger's teammates noticed his newfound swagger in training camp, but there's little danger he'll carry that confidence too far. "One thing I love about Marc is that he doesn't indulge in his own success," Faulk says. "He's too nice to be true."

When Bulger needs a dose of perspective, all he has to do is think back to 2000. Out of football after being cut by three teams, including the Rams that summer, Bulger went home to Pittsburgh and, he says, "turned into a fan again." In late October he was attending a Steelers game at Three Rivers Stadium when he received a call on his cellphone informing him that Warner had broken his finger and St. Louis wanted to sign him.

"That experience made me more appreciative of being here," Bulger says. "I remember thinking, Can I even play with those guys?"

This year, finally, we're going to find out. —M.S.

ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

This is a team that has made its run and is trying to see if there's anything left in the tank. There are still some talented people, but a lot of the best players—**Marshall Faulk**, **Isaac Bruce**, **Aeneas Williams**—are getting old. . . . Faulk still plays with great vision, but he doesn't have the explosiveness that he had two years ago. He'll still have games where he reminds you of the old Marshall, but mostly you'll notice something is missing. . . . Last year teams were able to pressure **Marc Bulger** and force him to make some bad throws. I'm sure he'll see more of that this year. . . . The offensive line is aging; **Adam Timmerman**, **Grant Williams** and even **Orlando Pace** are a little past their primes. . . . To solidify the defensive line, they really need **Damione Lewis** and **Ryan Pickett** to fulfill their potential. . . . The linebackers are small and fast; they're built for Lovie Smith's old Cover 2 scheme, so it will be interesting to see how they adapt to **Larry Marmie**'s new defense. . . . **Adam Archuleta** is probably best used in the nickel, where you can move him down into the box and have him defending the short zone instead of back in coverage.

ARCHULETA



“ Their linebackers are small and fast; they’re built for Lovie Smith’s old Cover 2 scheme. ”

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 12-4

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 30/3/9

DEFENSE T-20/12/16

COACH: Mike Martz;
fifth season with
St. Louis (43-21 in NFL)

MARSHALL FAULK

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	19	209	818	3.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
45	290	6.4	11	

MARC BULGER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	50	532	336	63.2
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,845	22	22	81.4	

JOEY GOODSPEED

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	398	0	0	0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
0	0	—	0	

JEFF WILKINS

POS.	PVR	Ks MADE	XPs ATT.
K	99	46	46
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.	
39	42	163	

OFFENSE

TORRY HOLT

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	16	117	1,696	12

BRANDON MANUMALEUNA

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	238	29	238	2

ORLANDO PACE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	325	16	16

CHRIS DISHMAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	350	14	2

ANDY McCOLLUM

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	300	16	16

ADAM TIMMERMAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	310	16	16

GRANT WILLIAMS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	320	16	0

ISAAC BRUCE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	69	69	981	5

DEFENSE

PISA TINOISAMOA

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	78	2	3

BYRCE FISHER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RE	24	2

DAMIONE LEWIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RT	16	½

ROBERT THOMAS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	70	2	0

RYAN PICKETT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LT	42	1

LEONARD LITTLE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LE	47	12½

BRANDON CHILLAR (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	133	2	1



KEVIN GARRETT

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	0	0	0

ADAM ARCHULETA

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	78	5	1

AENEAS WILLIAMS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	75	1	4

JERAMETRIUS BUTLER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
CB	71	4	4

SEAN LANDETA

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	59	42.8

NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172)

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 ARIZONA
19 at Atlanta
26 NEW ORLEANS

OCTOBER

3 at San Francisco
10 at Seattle
18 TAMPA BAY (M)
24 at Miami
31 Open date

NOVEMBER

7 NEW ENGLAND
14 SEATTLE
21 at Buffalo
29 at Green Bay (M)

DECEMBER

5 SAN FRANCISCO
12 at Carolina
19 at Arizona
27 PHILADELPHIA (M)

JANUARY

2 N.Y. JETS

(M) MONDAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-7 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .512 Games against playoff teams: 7

3

SAN FRANCISCO
49ERS

The price of cost-cutting: After shedding six offensive starters, the former powerhouse hangs its hopes on a still-developing defense

HIS JOB is to clear out intruding defenders, which he does as well as any fullback in the league. But the 49ers' Fred Beasley makes no effort to block the notion that a seismic shift has occurred in San Francisco, once home to Montana and Young, Rice and Owens, Walsh and his West Coast offense. "We've got to ride our defense, because that's the strength of this team," Beasley says. "Until we get the offense clicking, with all the new guys we're working into the lineup, it's going to be up to the D to carry us."

This is what happens to a team when it is the first in recent NFL history to lose its starting quarterback, halfback and both wideouts during a single off-season. The Niners parted with six offensive starters in all, including four former Pro Bowl performers: quarterback Jeff Garcia, halfback Garrison Hearst, wideout Terrell Owens

and guard Ron Stone. The new quarterback, Tim Rattay, has three NFL starts to his credit; Hearst's replacement, Kevan Barlow, fumbled five times in 201 carries last year; Brandon Lloyd and Cedrick Wilson, the projected starters at wideout, have a combined 49 receptions.

The motivation behind the upheaval, naturally, was money—cost-conscious owner John York, citing the team's protracted struggles with the salary cap, has mandated an approach that thrusts unproven players into prominent roles. Call

them the \$4.99ers: A simple glance at the cover of the team's media guide, featuring a fullback (Beasley) and a center (Jeremy Newberry), tells you all you need to know.

"I know people are looking at us and wondering, How are they going to score?" says strong safety Tony Parrish, who tied for the NFL lead with nine interceptions in 2003. "I think we have some guys who are

ready, but if it takes time for the offense to jell, I believe defensively we can hold down the fort."

A few years ago it was the defense that was full of untested players, who, for the most part, have evolved into productive per-

OFFENSIVE DEFENSE Safety Parrish not only intercepted nine passes but also averaged 22.4 yards on his returns.

PLAYER ON THE RISE


> Since they began winning Super Bowls 23 seasons ago, the 49ers have had at least one star receiver. It appears the next will be the spindly **BRANDON LLOYD**, who had 14 catches as a rookie and fills the void left by the trade of Terrell Owens. "He's got deceptive mobility," linebacker Jamie Winborn says. "He's going to make some spectacular catches for us."

and guard Ron Stone. The new quarterback, Tim Rattay, has three NFL starts to his credit; Hearst's replacement, Kevan Barlow, fumbled five times in 201 carries last year; Brandon Lloyd and Cedrick Wilson, the projected starters at wideout, have a combined 49 receptions.

The motivation behind the upheaval, naturally, was money—cost-conscious owner John York, citing the team's protracted struggles with the salary cap, has mandated an approach that thrusts unproven players into prominent roles. Call

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ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

formers. Though their best player, versatile outside linebacker Julian Peterson, missed most of training camp because of a contract dispute, the 49ers are confident about the continued progress of a unit that ranked fourth in the NFC in yards allowed in 2003.

Most of the faces are the same, including that of cornerback Ahmed Plummer, whom the organization, in a rare instance of largesse, re-signed to a five-year deal with an \$11 million signing bonus. The largest loss on defense was that of coordinator Jim Mora, who left to take over the Falcons. To replace Mora, San Francisco coach Dennis Erickson brought in former Steelers secondary coach Willy Robinson, whom Erickson had recruited while a Fresno State assistant in the mid-1970s. "He was a tough, overachieving defensive back who could knock your a-- off," Erickson says. "He coaches the same way."

Robinson is accustomed to a 3-4, which the Niners will deploy at times, much to the benefit of their aggressive linebackers. "The scheme is perfect for us," says dynamic inside linebacker Jamie Winborn, who missed the last seven games of 2003 with a neck injury. "It utilizes exactly what our strengths are—speed, technique and gap control."

It remains to be seen whether the new scheme will benefit fourth-year defensive end Andre Carter, a speed rusher whose relative lack of size (6' 4", 265 pounds) isn't ideal for the 3-4. With 25½ sacks over three seasons, he still hasn't had that Jevon Kearse-like breakout season. "We'll drop him back, stand him up and play him down—anything to try to get him more involved," Erickson says. "We're going to try to put him in position to make a huge impact."

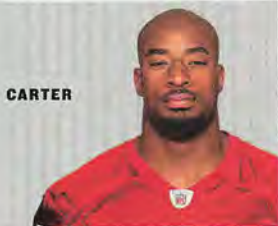
Carter is just one of many players who'll have to flourish for San Francisco to improve on last year's 7-9 campaign, one in which Owens publicly questioned the leadership and arm strength of his starting quarterback. This season, for better or worse, the Niners plan to stick together, the owner's cost-cutting be damned.

"We have no stars, but we also have no egos," Beasley says. Then, referring to Owens, he adds, "We have no more T.O.s, guys who are in it for their own purposes. Now it's all about the team, and we know we have to believe in ourselves."

Hey, why not? Somebody has to.

—M.S.

You don't want to get totally cocky before you play these guys, but they look really bad on paper. . . . With a lot of weapons around him, **Tim Rattay** might be able to run the offense and not screw things up. But now it will be very tough for him. . . . **Kevin Barlow** is a hard-charging back who has a tendency to fumble. Suddenly he's the guy teams have to stop, so he could be in for a rude awakening. . . . **Brandon Lloyd** has great body control and can make the acrobatic catch on the sidelines, but he's not a deep threat. . . . **Kwame Harris** was supposed to be an impact tackle coming out, but he was horrendous as a rookie—people just beat the tar out of him. . . . **Scott Gragg** struggles against power rushers; he's not the ideal right tackle, but he can't play left tackle. . . . **Andre Carter** can run as well as any pass rusher in the league, but he needs to have a huge year. . . . They really overpaid to keep **Ahmed Plummer**. When things go bad for him and you keep the pressure on, you can get to him mentally. . . . Ideally, **Ronnie Heard** would be a third safety. But that's what this team has become—a lot of the starters should be backups.



CARTER

Kwame Harris was supposed to be an impact tackle, but people just beat the tar out of him.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 7-9

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 5/10/5

DEFENSE 9/17/13

COACH: Dennis Erickson;
second season with San
Francisco (38-42 in NFL)

KEVAN BARLOW

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	27	201	1,024	5.1
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
35	307	8.8	7	

TIM RATTAY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	181	118	73	61.9
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
856	7	2	96.6	

FRED BEASLEY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	101	17	24	1.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
19	184	9.7	1	

TODD PETERSON

POS.	PVR	XP	MADE	XP	ATT.
K	265	22	23		
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.			
12	15	58			

OFFENSE

BRANDON LLOYD

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	186	14	212	2

ERIC JOHNSON*

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	153	36	321	0

KWAME HARRIS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	310	14	5

ERIC HEITMANN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	305	9	8

JEREMY NEWBERRY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	310	16	16

KYLE KOSIER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	293	16	12

SCOTT GRAGG

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 8"	315	15	14

CEDRICK WILSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	139	35	396	3

DEFENSE

JEFF ULBRICH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	74	2½	1

ANDRE CARTER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RE	34	6½	

ANTHONY ADAMS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
RT	26	1½	

DEREK SMITH

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	112	3½	0

BRYANT YOUNG

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LT	35	3½	

JOHN ENGELBERGER

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	
LE	29	4½	

JULIAN PETERSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	95	7	2

ANDY LEE (R)

POS.	PUNTS	AVG.
P	77	44.1



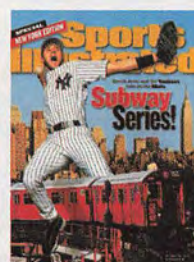
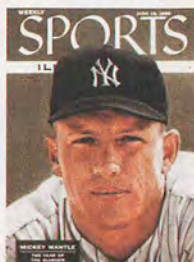
NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (stats for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2002 stats

SCHEDULE	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	12 ATLANTA 19 at New Orleans 26 at Seattle	3 ST. LOUIS 10 ARIZONA 17 at N.Y. Jets 24 Open date 31 at Chicago	7 SEATTLE 14 CAROLINA 21 at Tampa Bay 28 MIAMI	5 at St. Louis 12 at Arizona 18 WASHINGTON (S) 26 BUFFALO	2 at New England

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: T-7 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .512 Games against playoff teams: 5

(S) SATURDAY



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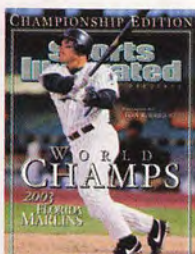
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4 ARIZONA CARDINALS

Dennis Green is in a hurry to win, but with an untested quarterback and a 35-year-old running back, progress will be slower than he expects

IT WAS the end of another long, hot training camp practice, and a hopeful fan had some words of advice for Dennis Green, the Cardinals' would-be savior. "Come on, Coach, you'll turn it around," the fan said. "Just be patient."

Fat chance. Green, who won a division title in his first year with the Vikings, favors a more urgent approach. "Patience is not one of my virtues," Green told the fan. "We need to get this going now."

Never mind that the Cardinals have had just one winning season during their 16-year run in the desert. And never mind that, as the 55-year-old Green willingly concedes, the team lacks talent in several key areas. Green, who led Minnesota to eight playoff berths in his 10 seasons there, is taking an aggressive approach toward raising Arizona—something that should be reflected by the Cardinals' high-flying attack.

Shortly after taking the job last January—Dave McGinnis was fired after a 4-12 season—Green put his faith in third-year quarterback Josh McCown, a tall Texan who showed promise during three late-season starts in 2003. In the finale McCown, a third-round draft choice out of Sam Houston State in '02, knocked Minnesota out of the playoffs with a last-play, 28-yard TD pass on fourth-and-25. "One thing you always like is a quarterback who's an athlete, and he's an exceptional

one," Green says of the mobile McCown. "He's an accurate passer, an intelligent man who understands football."

Not that Green is professing his lifelong devotion to McCown—after all, his eight Vikings teams that reached the postseason used seven starters under center. "I'd like to be the quarterback that sticks around awhile," McCown says.

Green shook up the team by cutting

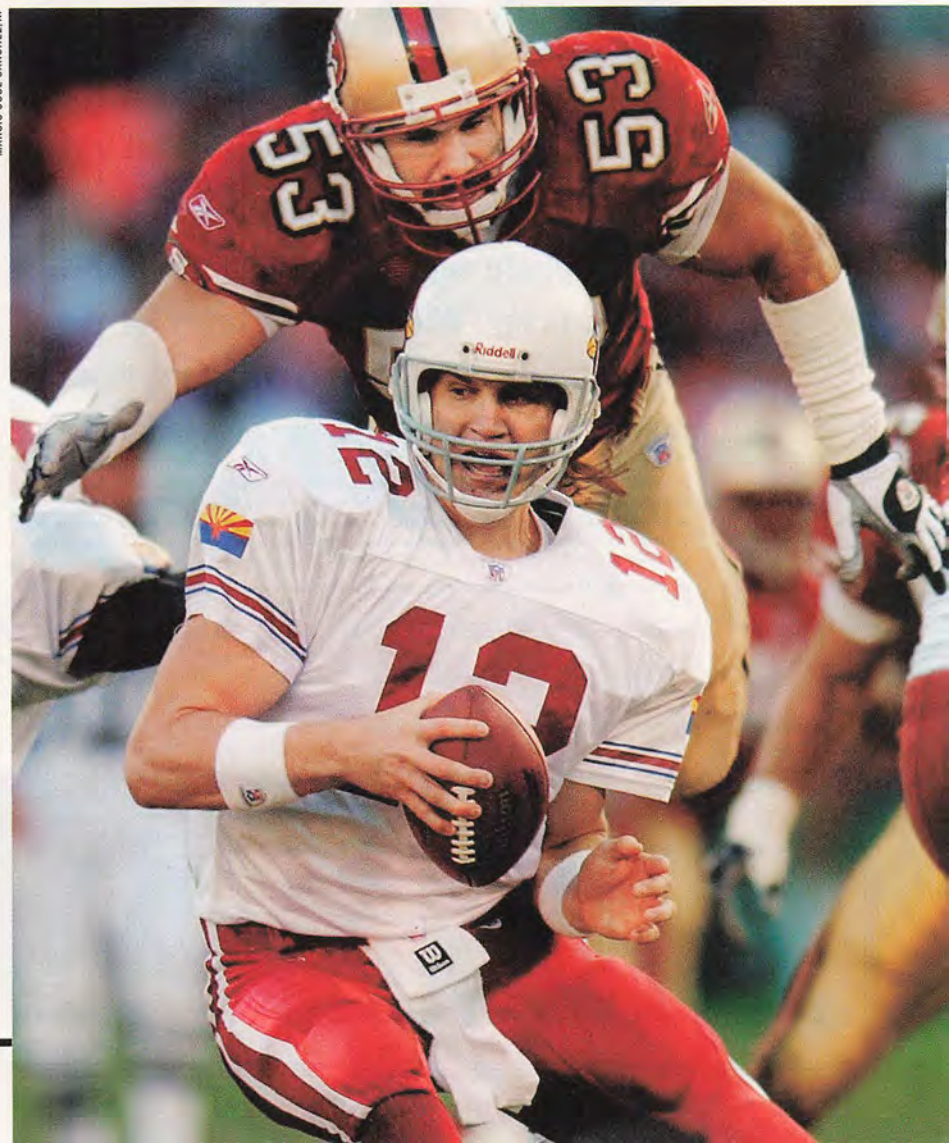
some players (including veteran offensive lineman Pete Kendall, a starter the past three seasons) and demoting others. He also used his keen skills as personnel evaluator to assemble a promising draft class, featuring Pitt wideout Larry Fitzgerald, the

CARD CARRIER While McCown has shown mobility and a live arm, his new coach has a penchant for switching QBs.

PLAYER ON THE RISE

> While Wendell Bryant, the 12th pick in the 2002 draft, languishes on the bench, **DARNELL DOCKETT** has a chance to establish himself at defensive end. A third-round pick out of Florida State, the 6' 4", 301-pound rookie quickly was named a starter. "To turn a program around," new coach Dennis Green says, "you have to play the guys you draft."

MARIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP



ENEMY LINES An opposing scout's view

No. 3 selection. Fitzgerald, a former Vikings ball boy who has known Green since he was a kid, joins last season's surprise Rookie of the Year, Anquan Boldin (a rookie-record 101 catches, for 1,357 yards and eight touchdowns), to create a tandem that could be scary for years to come.

Cris Carter and Randy Moss? "We just want to be Boldin and Fitzgerald," says the latter. "Getting the ball downfield is a big part of our offense."

Throw in third wideout Bryant Johnson, a first-round pick in 2003, and Freddie Jones, whom Green regards as a Pro Bowl-caliber tight end, and the strong-armed McCown has a chance to do some damage—especially when Boldin returns in mid-October from knee surgery. "I think a lot of people are going to be surprised, especially when we start putting up wins," Jones says. "Just like last year—Carolina went with a new, young quarterback, Jake Delhomme, and lo and behold he went to the Super Bowl. I think Josh is that type of guy."

The Cardinals do have one prominent player on offense for whom Super Bowls are more than a fantasy. With speedy fourth-year back Marcel Shipp out with a broken left leg, which could sideline him for much of the season, the bulk of Arizona's rushing chores will be handled by 35-year-old Emmitt Smith. Last year Smith ran for just 256 yards in 10 games, gaining a mere 2.8 yards per carry. Green, however, is one of the few respected NFL minds convinced that Smith is not done.

"Emmitt is a lot better player than he appeared to be [in 2003], and I think he'll show it," Green insists. "I didn't get the feeling last year that the offensive linemen took enough pride in the fact that they were blocking for the all-time leading rusher. This year, I believe they'll get it."

With a new stadium under construction in suburban Glendale (it's set to open in 2006) and a proven winner in charge, the Cardinals believe they may finally field a competitive team. They have visions of playing in front of fans actually rooting for the home team, cheering a prolific offense as it launches yet another scoring drive.

"By the end of this year I expect our stadium to be full," McCown says. "The only way you're going to get people to come out on those hot days is to put a product out there that's worth watching—and to win. We plan to do both."

—M.S.

The first thing that jumps out at you is their lack of a pass rush. If you can't get to the passer in this league, you're in trouble, and last year the only way they could generate heat was to blitz **Raynoch Thompson** off the outside. . . . I like their linebackers, especially **Ron McKinnon**—he's a tough guy who plays at a good tempo. They're playing **Gerald Hayes** over the tight end, but he should be back beyond the line of scrimmage. . . . **Denny Green** can coach quarterbacks, and I can see **Josh McCown** emerging as a big-time player. He's a good decision-maker with a smooth delivery and a really good arm. . . . The offensive line is big and strong and can block in the running game, but it has trouble with mobility. Once **Leonard Davis** gets his hands on a defender, that guy's in trouble. But Davis still isn't playing like a top five pick. . . . With the injury to **Marcel Shipp**, the thought of **Emmitt Smith** trying to carry the rushing load is scary. . . . The receivers lack speed. As good as **Anquan Boldin** was last year, he caught a lot of passes when they were way behind. If a defense focuses on shutting him down, he can't run away and get open.

McKINNON



Denny Green can coach quarterbacks; I can see McCown emerging as a big-time player.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2003 statistics

2003 RECORD: 4-12

NFL RANK

(rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 29/23/27

DEFENSE 19/29/26

COACH: Dennis Green;
first season with
Arizona (97-62 in NFL)

EMMITT SMITH

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	102	90	256	2.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
14	107	7.6	2	

JOSH MCCOWN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	84	166	95	57.2
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,018	5	6	70.3	

ANQUAN BOLDIN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
WR	93	5	40	8.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
101	1,377	13.6	8	

NEIL RACKERS

POS.	PVR	XP	MADE	XP	ATT.
K	255	8	8		
FG MADE	FG ATT.	PTS.			
9	12	35			

OFFENSE

LARRY FITZGERALD (R)

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	67	92	1,672	22

FREDDIE JONES

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	106	55	517	3

LEONARD DAVIS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 6"	384	14	14

REGGIE WELLS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	298	15	1

ALEX STEPANOVICH (R)

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	301	9	9

CAMERON SPIKES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	325	16	16

ANTHONY CLEMENT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 8"	333	16	16

BRYANT JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	146	35	438	1

DEFENSE

KARLOS DANSBY (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	84	5½	0

BERTRAND BERRY

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RE	37	1½

RUSSELL DAVIS

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
RT	38	1

RON MCKINNON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
MLB	105	2	0

ROSS KOLODZIEJ

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LT	0	0

DARNELL DOCKETT (R)

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS
LE	55	1½

RAYNOCH THOMPSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
OLB	63	3	0

DAVID MACKLIN

POS.	TACKLES	INT.
CB	32	1

ADRIAN WILSON

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
SS	79	0	0

IFEANYI OHALETE

POS.	TACKLES	SACKS	INT.
FS	93	0	3

DUANE STARKS*

POS.	TACKLES	INT.
CB	55	2



NEW ACQUISITION (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 172) *2002 stats

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at St. Louis
19 NEW ENGLAND
26 at Atlanta

OCTOBER

3 NEW ORLEANS
10 at San Francisco
17 Open date
24 SEATTLE
31 at Buffalo

NOVEMBER

7 at Miami
14 N.Y. Giants
21 at Carolina
28 N.Y. JETS

DECEMBER

5 at Detroit
12 SAN FRANCISCO
19 ST. LOUIS
26 at Seattle

JANUARY

2 TAMPA BAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 5 Opponents' 2003 winning percentage: .523 Games against playoff teams: 5

PVR

PLAYER VALUE RANKING

We ranked the NFL's skill-position players and kickers from 1 to 425, based on our projections of their statistical production this season. The categories considered were scoring (touchdowns, field goals, extra points), long scoring plays (25 yards or more), big-game potential (300 yards passing or 100 yards rushing or receiving) and passing efficiency. We also took into account each player's statistics from previous seasons, as well as his role on his current team, his potential for improvement and his injury history. Below are our ratings by position along with each PVR.

SI.com For the complete list of PVRs, go to si.com/fantasy. For scores, team pages, rosters and individual and team statistics, plus the latest news and analysis from Peter King, Michael Silver and Paul Zimmerman, go to si.com/football.

POSITION PLAYERS

RANK PLAYER.....PVR

QUARTERBACKS

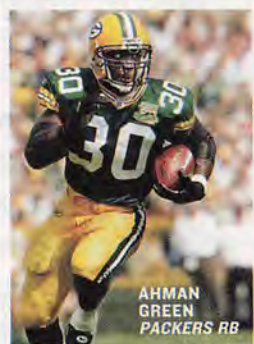
1. Peyton Manning	9
2. Steve McNair	13
3. Daunte Culpepper	14
4. Michael Vick	24
5. Brett Favre	29
6. Donovan McNabb	30
7. Trent Green	35
8. Matt Hasselbeck	37
9. Tom Brady	39
10. Chad Pennington	46
11. Marc Bulger	50
12. Aaron Brooks	54
13. Jake Delhomme	59
14. Carson Palmer	64
15. Rich Gannon	74
16. Brad Johnson	81
17. Joey Harrington	82
18. Jake Plummer	83
19. Josh McCown	84
20. Drew Bledsoe	91
21. Jeff Garcia	97
22. Kyle Boller	98
23. Mark Brunell	105
24. Rex Grossman	114
25. David Carr	120
26. Byron Leftwich	121
27. Eli Manning	133



PEYTON MANNING
COLTS QB

28. Ben Roethlisberger	136
29. Vinny Testaverde	152
30. Jay Fiedler	160
31. Kurt Warner	168
32. Tim Rattay	181
33. Tommy Maddox	182
34. Drew Brees	187
35. Chris Chandler	235

RUNNING BACKS



AHMAN GREEN
PACKERS RB

1. Priest Holmes	1
2. LaDainian Tomlinson	2
3. Clinton Portis	3
4. Ahman Green	4
5. Shaun Alexander	5
6. Edgerrin James	6
7. Jamal Lewis	7
8. Deuce McAllister	10
9. Rudi Johnson	11
10. Corey Dillon	12
11. Marshall Faulk	19
12. Fred Taylor	20
13. Chris Brown	21
14. Stephen Davis	22
15. Duce Staley	23
16. Travis Henry	26
17. Kevan Barlow	27
18. Quentin Griffin	28
19. Michael Bennett	38
20. Tiki Barber	40
21. Domanick Davis	41
22. Curtis Martin	42
23. Kevin Jones	43
24. Brian Westbrook	48
25. Lee Suggs	53
26. Thomas Jones	56

27. Warrick Dunn	57
28. Willis McGahee	58
29. Tyrone Wheatley	65
30. Eddie George	80
31. Charlie Garner	92
32. Ron Dayne	95
33. T.J. Duckett	100
34. Fred Beasley	101
35. Emmitt Smith	102
36. William Green	107
37. Julius Jones	109
38. Mewelde Moore	111
39. Travis Minor	115
40. Steven Jackson	116
41. Tatum Bell	117
42. Greg Jones	131
43. Mike Alstott	135
44. Anthony Thomas	140
45. Antowain Smith	141
46. Najeh Davenport	143
47. Jerome Bettis	145
48. Kevin Faulk	159
49. Richie Anderson	162
50. Artose Pinner	163
51. DeShaun Foster	171
52. Tony Richardson	174
53. Rob Konrad	175
54. Reno Mahe	176
55. James Mungro	183
56. Derrick Blaylock	189
57. Justin Fargas	193
58. Musa Smith	204
59. Chris Perry	205
60. Moe Williams	206

WIDE RECEIVERS

1. Randy Moss	8
2. Marvin Harrison	15
3. Torrey Holt	16
4. Terrell Owens	17
5. Chad Johnson	25
6. Derrick Mason	31
7. Laveranues Coles	32
8. Santana Moss	34
9. Keyshawn Johnson	44
10. Eric Moulds	47
11. Hines Ward	49
12. Joe Horn	51
13. Chris Chambers	52
14. Steve Smith	55
15. Amani Toomer	60
16. Javon Walker	61
17. Charles Rogers	62
18. Deion Branch	66
19. Larry Fitzgerald	67
20. Darrell Jackson	68
21. Isaac Bruce	69
22. Andre Johnson	70
23. Jimmy Smith	71
24. Plaxico Burress	72
25. Peerless Price	75
26. Peter Warrick	76
27. Rod Smith	77
28. Reggie Wayne	78
29. Jerry Rice	79
30. Muhsin Muhammad	88
31. Dante Hall	89
32. Kevin Johnson	90
33. Anquan Boldin	93
34. Donald Driver	94
35. Jerry Porter	103
36. Quincy Morgan	104
37. Robert Ferguson	118

38. Ashley Lelie	119
39. Justin McCareins	122
40. Ike Hilliard	123
41. Tim Brown	124
42. Bobby Engram	125
43. David Givens	127
44. Nate Burleson	128
45. Donte Stallworth	129
46. Dez White	130
47. Marcus Robinson	134
48. Koren Robinson	137
49. Terry Glenn	138
50. Cedrick Wilson	139
51. Marty Booker	142
52. Bryant Johnson	146
53. Roy Williams	147
54. Rod Gardner	148
55. Andre Davis	149
56. Travis Taylor	150
57. Lee Evans	151
58. David Terrell	154
59. Eric Parker	155

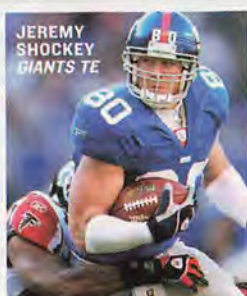


TORREY HOLT
RAMS WR

60. Johnnie Morton	158
61. Dennis Northcutt	161
62. Eddie Kennison	169
63. Joey Galloway	170
64. Tyrone Calico	177
65. Drew Bennett	178
66. Corey Bradford	179
67. Reggie Williams	180
68. Brandon Lloyd	186
69. Todd Pinkston	191
70. Troy Brown	192
71. Michael Clayton	195
72. T.J. Houshmandzadeh	196
73. Kelly Campbell	200
74. Brandon Stokley	201
75. Josh Reed	202

TIGHT ENDS

1. Tony Gonzalez	18
2. Todd Heap	33
3. Jeremy Shockey	36
4. Kellen Winslow Jr.	45
5. Marcus Pollard	63
6. Bubba Franks	73
7. Alge Crumpler	85
8. Anthony Becht	86
9. Randy McMichael	87
10. Freddie Jones	106
11. Boo Williams	110
12. Antonio Gates	112
13. Chad Lewis	126
14. Eric Johnson	153
15. Daniel Graham	164
16. Dallas Clark	185



JEREMY SHOCKEY
GIANTS TE

17. Jed Weaver	190
18. Erron Kinney	194
19. Jim Kleinsasser	197
20. Itula Mili	198

KICKERS

1. Mike Vanderjagt	96
2. Jeff Wilkins	99
3. David Akers	108
4. Adam Vinatieri	113
5. Jason Elam	132
6. Ryan Longwell	144
7. Matt Stover	156
8. John Kasay	157
9. Sebastian Janikowski	165
10. Jay Feely	166
11. Jason Hanson	167
12. John Carney	172
13. Joe Nedney	173
14. John Hall	184
15. Shayne Graham	188
16. Jeff Reed	203
17. Josh Brown	207
18. Martin Gramatica	215
19. Aaron Elling	223
20. Doug Brien	225

DEFENSES

1. Ravens	17. Steelers
2. Patriots	18. Lions
3. Panthers	19. Eagles
4. Cowboys	20. Redskins
5. Chiefs	21. Saints
6. Dolphins	22. Seahawks
7. Titans	23. 49ers
8. Vikings	24. Jaguars
9. Bills	25. Jets
10. Bucs	26. Bears
11. Packers	27. Falcons
12. Broncos	28. Cardinals
13. Rams	29. Texans
14. Bengals	30. Giants
15. Colts	31. Browns
16. Raiders	32. Chargers



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RAVENS CB

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Mind over Medal

by Rick Reilly



WHAT'S AN Olympic gold medal worth? The woman who just won the 200-meter butterfly in Athens is fixing to find out.

She's going to sell it.

Poland's Otylia Jędrzejczak will keep it until December, just to show her friends, pose for pictures and feel its tug on the back of her neck, and

then she'll put it up for the highest bid at a Polish auction house.

She got the idea after reading a book about a child with leukemia who writes letters to God, telling how he feels about dying. The last entry is made by his nurse, who writes, *Oscar was a very brave boy.*

"I was waiting before my race, and I decided if I win the gold medal, God help me, I will give it to the children," she said last week from Warsaw.

What's a gold medal bring? Well, there's only about \$100 worth of gold in a gold medal, but eBay bidders think they're worth more. Last week a gold won by Canadian boxer Albert Schneider at the 1920 Antwerp Games sold on the auction website for \$3,676, and a gold won by Cuban catcher Alberto Hernandez at the '92 Barcelona Games went for \$3,551. Up for bid *this* week were golds that Hernandez got in Atlanta in '96 and Romanian gymnast Ecaterina Szabo won in L.A. in '84. Hey, immortality doesn't put supper on the table.

"Oh, I am hoping for much more," Jędrzejczak said.

But won't you miss being able to see it, touch it, display it? "I do not need to see the medal to know I won it," she says. "The medal is in my heart."

Mark Spitz's nine gold medals aren't in his heart. They're in a safe-deposit box at all times. Rulon Gardner keeps his gold medal in a safe in his garage. Summer Sanders keeps hers in a sock drawer. Not exactly beacons of joy to the world.

Carl Lewis buried one of his nine golds with his father. Dick Button had his first one made into a belt buckle for his mother. Muhammad Ali threw his off a bridge. When Bill Johnson won the 1984 downhill in Sarajevo, reporters asked him what winning meant to him. "Millions and millions," Johnson said. He's still waiting.

What's a gold worth when nobody's sure you deserved it? Gymnast Paul Hamm might tell you. What's it worth when you've won five others? "Between \$30 million and \$50 million" over Michael Phelps's lifetime, says his agent, Peter Carlisle.

What's it worth overseas? The Romanian government will give each of its gymnasts who won the women's team title \$50,000 cash, two cars, a college scholarship and a rent-free apartment.

If you have a comment for Rick Reilly, send it to reilly@siletters.com.

Not bad in a country where the average take-home pay is less than \$175 a month. In Ukraine a gold fetches \$100,000, plus a free apartment in Kiev. Win gold in Kenya, and you get a flat-screen TV and a washing machine.

But what's a gold medal worth if you lose it? Ask Matt Emmons of the U.S. With one shot to go in Athens, Emmons was on his way to a laughter of a win in the three-position 50-meter rifle event. In fact, all he had to do was hit the target. It'd be like telling Picasso all he had to do was hit the canvas.

Emmons fired, then looked at his monitor to see how he'd done. But there was no bullet hole. He told an official he thought there was some weird glitch. Just then the official saw two holes in the target of the shooter next to Emmons and announced that the American would receive a zero for the shot.

"I changed my routine a little," Emmons said, "and it cost me."

With one crossfire Emmons, 23, had blown a gold medal and the \$25,000 bonus the USOC pays for gold. That kind of money may be cab fare to Phelps, but it's large to a guy going to school and driving a used Blazer.

"I do not need to see the medal to know I won it," Poland's Otylia Jędrzejczak says. "The medal is in my heart."

"I don't know why, but my first thought wasn't, I want to cut my throat," said Emmons, who earlier in the Games had won the 50-meter prone rifle event. "I just said to myself, These things happen."

So he did something completely screwy. He didn't blame anybody but himself. Didn't

blame the setup, in which the targets were only three feet apart, unusually cramped in shooting. He didn't file a protest or a grievance, or fake a motorcycle accident. He just said, "I made a mistake, and I don't deserve the gold medal."

He put down his rifle, shook the hand of the shocked winner and hugged teammate Michael Anti, who had suddenly won silver.

And that's when all the good stuff started happening.

Every shooter and every coach came up to Emmons, who had NASDAQed to eighth place, held him by the shoulders and said, "You were the best shooter today." His parents started getting calls, letters and media attention, everyone wanting to know how they raised a kid like that.

"You hate to say this," says his dad, Dick, of Browns Mill, N.J., "but in a way this is the best thing that could've happened to him. Everybody in shooting has gone out of their way to tell him how they feel about him. His mom and I are happier about this than any medal."

What's a gold medal worth when it's gone?

"I don't need the medal to know I was the best in the world that day," Emmons says. "So I guess it's kind of in my heart, too."

Beats a sock drawer. □

Pictured: UA Metal™ Shortsleeve Mock (0445), TurfGear® Full Finger Lineman Glove (0097), UA 1" Wristbands, ©2004 UNDER ARMOUR® Performance Apparel.

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